APRIL 15th ISSUE, 1932
VOL. LXXXII No. 3

25¢

PUBLISHED
TWICE
A MONTH

PRINTED IN CANADA

Adventure

April 15th

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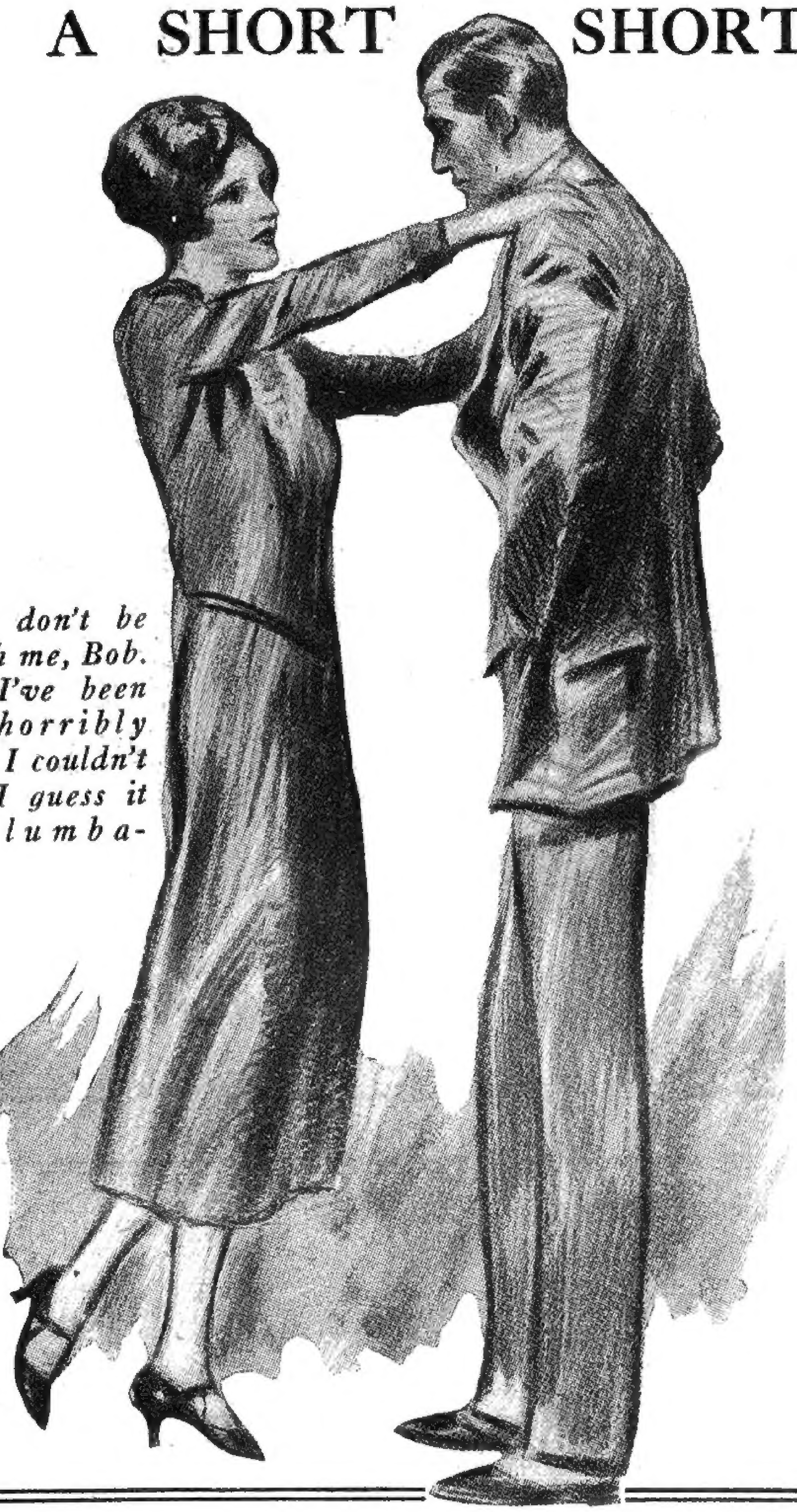

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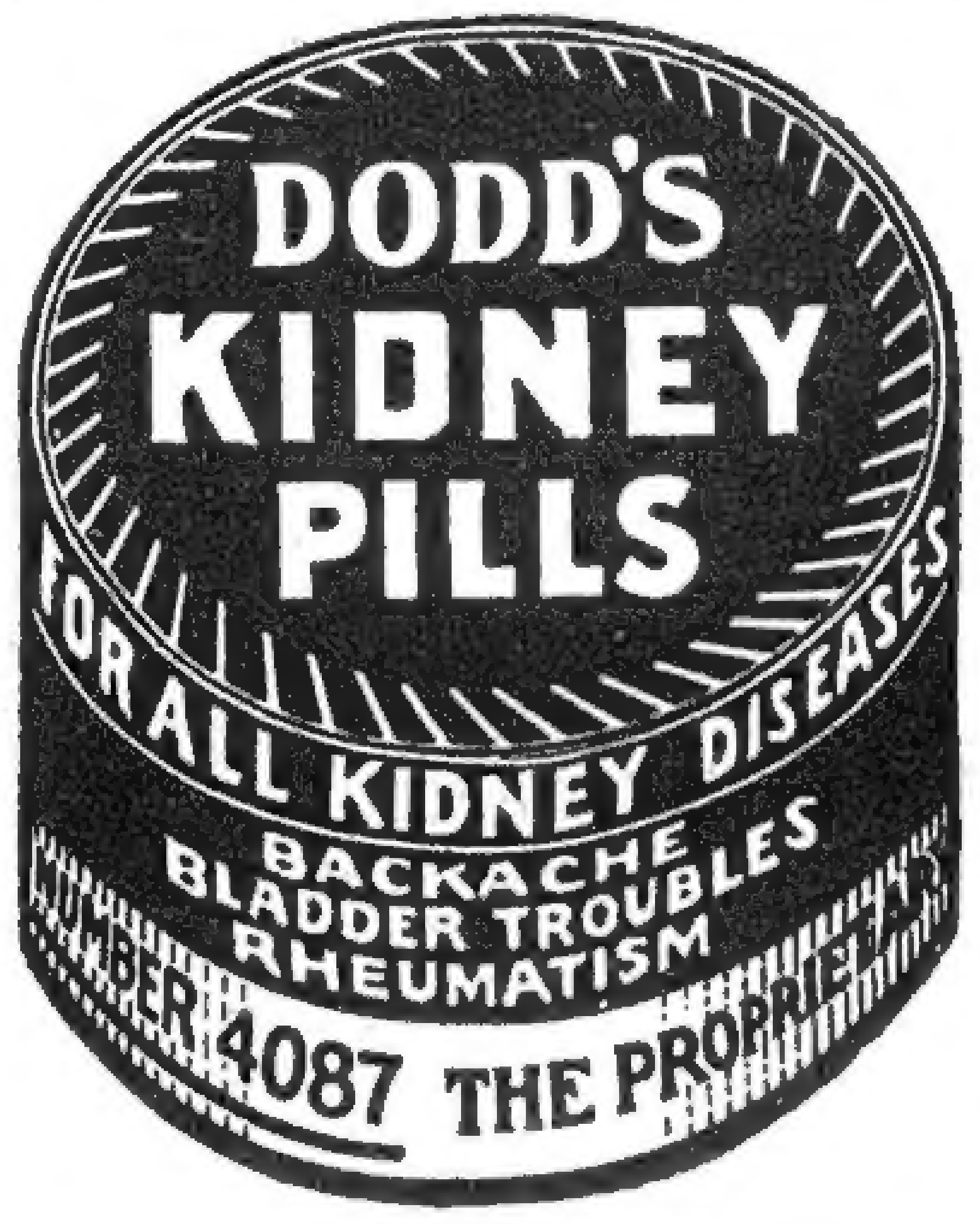
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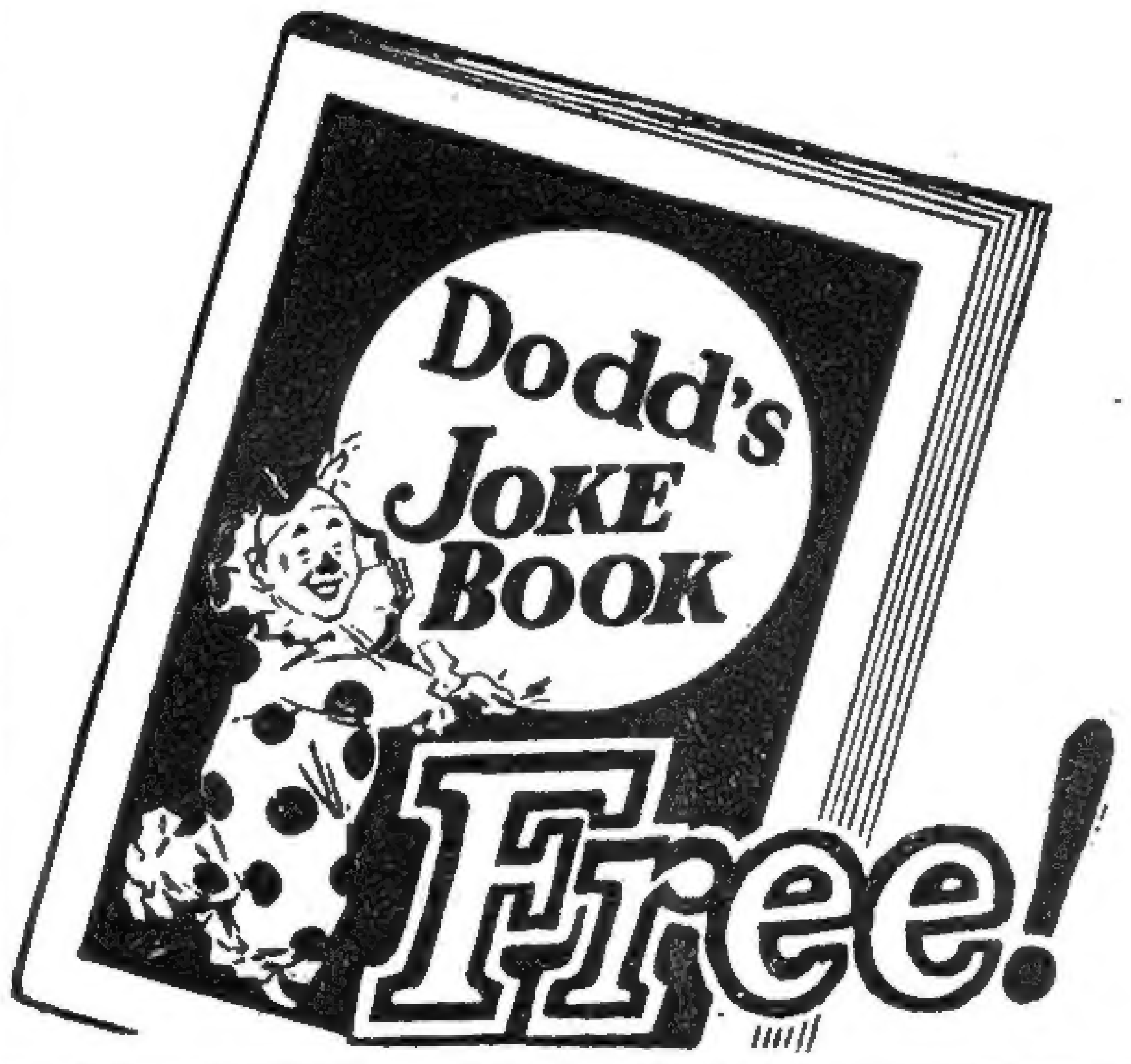
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Cover Design by Gerard C. Delano *Headings by Neil O'Keeffe*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, 161 - 6th Avenue, New York, U.S.A., Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; W. C. Evans, Secretary; Fred Lewis, Treasurer; A. A. Proctor, Editor. Yearly subscription $5.00 in advance. Remittances for Canadian subscriptions to be sent to The MacLean Publishing Company, Limited, 153 University Avenue, Toronto. Single copy, twenty-five cents. Trade Mark Registered;
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CANADIAN EDITION
Printed and Distributed in Canada by The MacLean Publishing Company, Limited, 153 University Ave., Toronto 2, Ont.

The DEVIL'S PASSPORT

Beginning a novel of Don Everhard, Prince of Gentlemen Adventurers

By GORDON YOUNG

CHAPTER I

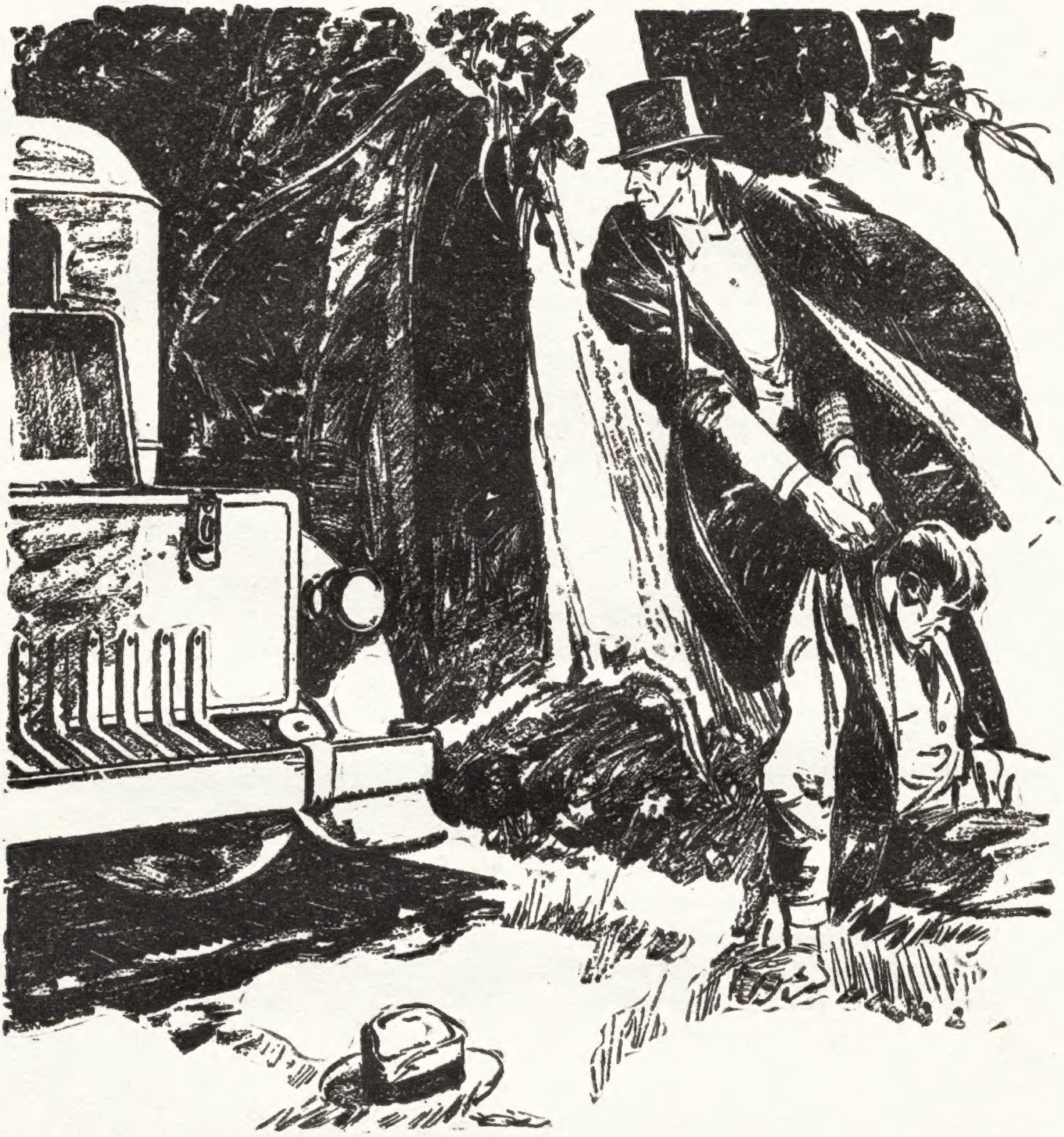
IN THE DARK

DON EVERHARD has always been a hard one for either crooks or honest men to figure. Almost from boyhood he lived on the ragged edge of the underworld and frankly made a business of trimming crooked gamblers and confidence men. A dangerous business; but he shoots quite as well as he plays cards. In some States it may be against the law to carry a gun. It isn't in any of them to shoot in self-defense, and Everhard has never been in prison.

He comes of a well known California family, and his grandfather took him to Paris as a child and left him in a French home to learn the language and good manners. It amuses Everhard to say that he learned the language perfectly—other things not so well. He is easily amused; but when in earnest a flash comes into his peculiar blue-gray eyes, and his voice may still be soft, but I have heard men say it made the gooseflesh stand out on them to hear it. You get the feeling that some invisible presence, like Death himself, has walked into the room and is about to take a part.

Old McDonald Richmond, the grandfather, was a famous character. He often carried young Don about with him into saloons and gambling halls. It was what Everhard saw and heard as a boy that made him want to turn the tables on crooked gamblers.

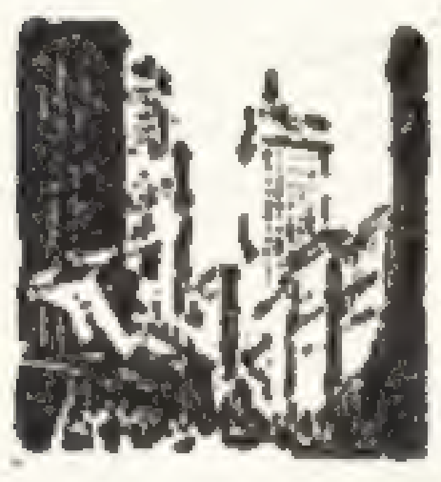
He was not quite seventeen when his grandfather was killed in a San Francisco gambling house by a notorious gunman, who taunted the wine fuddled old Forty-niner into drawing first. Less than a week later a boy with a hard glint in his eyes walked into the same gambling house, taunted the gunman into drawing first, then killed him.



After that young Donald Richmond took the name Everhard as a sort of self-reminder and challenge: and since then his reputation, whether or not he deserves it, has caused disputes in newspapers, in police circles, even in courts.

J. K. James of Washington, internationally known as the chief of a bureau that is closely hooked up with the Secret Service, married one of Everhard's cousins; but the close friendship between the two men was for a long time kept pretty much of a secret because Don Everhard's reputation has not always been of the best. Don has figured in headlines.

I have never known Everhard to say but one untrue thing about himself. He insists that he really doesn't like getting into trouble. Nobody believes that. In Paris, when he was giving me the notes for this story of La Tête de Mort—The Death's Head—he asked me to explain carefully that he tried to keep out of messes. But even as he sat at a little iron table on the sidewalk, sipping Vichy and watching the crowd, I could see the faint bulge of a .45 automatic under the shoulder of his neat, dark, double-breasted coat, and in his eyes there was still the half amused light of the audacity that had just startled sensation-loving Paris.



THERE used to be in Washington a Colonel Milton P. Gregg. Called colonel because nearly all his life he had washed the dirty dishes of some political crowd and by way of reward had once been appointed to a weak eyed governor's staff. For years Gregg had been a party snooper, the sort of idle clubman and social figure who calls important people by their first names and bobs about as a fill-in at dinners, playing Washington's game of tittle-tattle, and worse.

One morning he sent for J. K. James, hastily made a rather incoherent confession, then poked a gun at his own breast. James' quick blow deflected the gun, but the bullet struck close to Gregg's heart.

He was hurried into a private hospital, and at a word from James the doctors kept the thing quiet.

Everhard, under some other name as usual, happened to be in Washington and the burly James pounced on him.

"See here, Don. You're built and look the devil of a lot like the colonel, so—"

"And you've got men paid to wear false whiskers. Leave me out."

"The colonel was smooth shaven. That ties you up. He'd rather die than meet a stranger who's coming to see him tonight. I've got to know just how that fellow would have talked to the colonel. It can be easily framed. He lived alone with a chink. I'll get rid of that Chinaman and put my own there. Your part won't take more than an hour. Maybe I'll learn something. If Gregg had waited till he answered my questions, I don't think I'd have tried to stop him. His racket was blackmail."

"And you say I look like him? Why didn't you kick him out of town long ago?"

"How can detectives learn anything till somebody confesses—or we read it in the papers, eh?" James laughed.

"Quite true. But isn't it against the law for crooks to be smarter than cops?"

"You would think of that, wouldn't you?" James laughed and fished a crumpled cigaret from his pocket, reached about haphazardly in his pockets for a match. "As for Gregg—you've lived a lot in Paris. Ever hear of La Tête de Mort?"

"Some."

"Go on." James talked with the cigaret between his lips. It bobbed as if dodging the lighted match. "Tell me things. I'm eager to learn."

"This was in the Paris papers, some three or four years ago. Be news to you though, of course."

"Yeah," said James, scratching the corner of his mouth and nodding.

"A dirty little rat used a knife on a street girl. The splatter of it didn't reach the front page until a lawyer with gray hair and lots of medals made a speech to the police and showed them a note, together with some thousands of francs. Note was signed by a seal of skull and crossbones. Didn't ask him—just told him!—to defend M. l'Apache. He said he wouldn't. And he didn't—being found the next morning in the Seine with his throat cut."

"Precisely!" James slapped the table with open palm. "And who the hell knows how many big lawyers, not only in Paris, but in London, Berlin, New York, have got the same kind of kick-in letters? With clippings enclosed of the story you've just told—and quietly done as they were told!"

"Hm. Plenty of tricky shysters would rejoice to do the job. Why big lawyers?"

"I can ask a harder one than that. Why does this skull bird so often pick on highly respected lawyers to defend the dirtiest crooks?"

"Then it is a regular game."

"I'll say! Has a hell of a sense of humor, Mr. Death's Head. Plays jokes on people. Gregg's the latest. It's big. And nobody really knows a damn thing about it."

"Gregg must have."

"I just love to be told things by bright little boys!" James grinned, rough and good natured. "Listen. La Tête de Mort reached out of the dark some few years back and hooked the colonel. Since then he's been peddling scandal and secrets to an address in Paris. I've already cabled, but I know the answer that's coming. Some old washerwoman or vegetable pedler made a few francs by holding the mail until it was called for—by whom? A taxi driver, maybe. Or shop girl. Who then passed it on to whom? Take a city directory and poke your finger at the first name you see. Good guess as any. Plant some letters and watch where they go. At best you'll catch somebody that doesn't know what it's all about. My friends in Paris have been through this sort of thing before."

"Then I'd make some new friends. Not all Frenchmen are clever—but all their women are."

"Yeah, we learned that together one night, didn't we?" James gazed reminiscently at his broad toe, then chuckled. "But about Gregg. He was blackmailed into peddling blackmail. But was well paid. So he didn't fool me when he groaned about what he'd suffered. He didn't begin to suffer until a few days ago. What was done with the stuff he sent, he doesn't know—or says so. I believe him. My guess is that it was shot back to agents in this country who put on the screws. The Death's Head uses nearly every kind of crook, big and little. Or anybody else who can be tempted by easy money or scared by threats. So let's get a one-armed man to count on his fingers the people in any city who can't be bought or scared—somehow."

"And he'd have three or four fingers too many," Everhard said musingly.

"Right. But this La Tête thing likes getting a fat fish into his net. I can't prove it—yet; but I've got more than a hunch that he's socked his harpoon even into whales.

"And, Don, there's no way of telling how often he's behind some big tragedy, murder or suicide. Except that Gregg squealed, we'd never have guessed why he shot himself. You'll be interested to know what Gregg was up against. This: 'Buy back your own reports, or they will be turned over to J. K. James'! How's that one? The price would have stripped Gregg naked as a fishworm. No wonder he shot himself. Anybody would at finding he'd been such a sucker."

"And you want to catch this stranger trying to blackmail somebody who looks like Gregg."

"It's worth a try—though it's ninety-nine to a hundred that the fellow who's coming doesn't know who sent him. He's just been told to come. Hasn't any idea who sent him. Knows he'll be paid and protected—or killed if he stumbles. The answer of all the agents who have been caught here, or in Paris, is, 'Somebody tells us what to do. They pay well, but kill if you quit. I don't know who they are and I'm too smart to try to find out!' So you see, Don, there really is something new under the sun."

"Just what?"

"I've just told you. When crooks won't squeal, the police go gaga. They've nothing to tie to. And the only reason crooks don't squeal when properly coaxed is because they can't. They don't know where to point the finger. La Tête de Mort and his big shots hide in shadows. The thing started as blackmail. It's outgrown that."

"No crook can be successful unless the police help him," said Everhard. "I know. I always get a lot of help when they think I'm crooked."

"Yes," James responded wearily, "I've heard that one before. It's the French theory too. They're so afraid this thing has spies and agents at the Prefecture—and it undoubtedly has—that the Préfet sometime ago turned the job over to an old friend of mine to do as he pleased and confide in nobody. I'm about the only one who knows. And I'm not telling anybody at any time.

They'd kill him in a minute. That's their game: 'Play with me, at least lay off me, or be killed'!"

"Nothing original about that."

"Oh, yes, there is," said James, searching about for another crumpled cigaret and fishing absently for a match. "God knows why, but most crooks respect a dick they can't buy or scare. But this Death's Head, son, feels so damn sure his crimes can't be backtracked that he shies at nothing. And he likes blood. Likes it, damn him!

"Also, there's no doubt of it, he's hooked big gamblers—the stock kind, bankers, politicians, society women, all sorts of people who've got secrets to hide. Others who are willing to sell out their friends in this game of easy money. But try and touch some of these big babies and see what falls on you! They can pull wires that'll make the Statue of Liberty sock you with her lamp. It's not what you know that counts when you monkey with big people. It's do their friends want to turn 'em in, step aside, give 'em the works."

"You read the tabloids, too, don't you?" Everhard said.

And you'd get the rabies if I did what I feel like."

" 'Be a detective. Earn big money'."

"By the Lord, there's one detective that'll nail La Tête de Mort! That Frenchman I just mentioned. He comes of a family that's hatched great detectives. In their blood. He's worked all over the world. I was with him during the war—that's why I've got a job now. He saved my official neck time after time, and tossed credit to me like I toss pennies to a pencil pedler. Know his family intimately. They'd go through with anything."

"Yes, Jim James, I've noticed how you quit just as soon as a job gets tough. Quit eating, sleeping, or speaking to friends."

"Don, you know we give false whiskers and such stuff the big laugh in this country, but you ought to see what that guy can do—what he can do with his face and false teeth. One day I was using my bad German on a string of prisoners. In a camp, you know. I found one who opened up and told me things. It was the old boy himself. He'd gone in there and played himself as one of 'em. And was spilling it to me. He doesn't want credit—he wants results.

"And since this Death's Head thing has become a problem over here, he's told me what they're up against in Paris. You know I have to go across three or four or more times a year. He's trying to put agents into the Death's Head gangs, and it's tough going. Lots of the agents quit cold on him—so many of 'em get murdered. He'll stop at nothing."

"Why doesn't he try to get in himself?" Everhard inquired.

"He did build his own son up as a clever, degenerate criminal. And I could tell you more than that, but I'm under oath not to. Lord, you've no idea. Well, the Death's Head gave the son a workout that no halfway honest man could stand. But the boy went through with it. Got in. Got moved up a notch. That is, he was put in charge of some other crooks who didn't know who was over 'em. Then something happened. Nobody knows just what. The boy probably didn't realize that he was being watched as closely as ever. Anyhow, they tortured and killed him. But he never mentioned his father's name. Made out of iron, that family. Man, what I could tell you! But I've told you enough to show why I'd give this right hand to blow La Tête de Mort to hell. That boy was like a brother."

THAT night James streaked Everhard's hair with white, made a few light marks on his face with charcoal and put him into a long tailed coat. He turned the lights on and off in Gregg's library until he got the effect that suited: Not bright enough to show Everhard's slight makeup; not dim enough to make it look as if he were afraid of light.

"I don't have to tell *you,*" said James, "to be careful to shoot first. This fellow's coming for a talk. Most likely won't do anything, no matter what you tell him. But Gregg shot himself because he knew somebody would. So watch out. We're playing with dynamite."

James went into the next room, leaving a crack at the door.

Everhard stood up behind a broad library table as the Chinaman brought the stranger in.

He was dapper, middle aged, suave, with a bald place on the front of his head and had a polka dotted handkerchief sticking up in his breast pocket.

"Good evening, Colonel. I'm Wilson."

He was rather mild and nice about it.

"Yes, Wilson. Sit down."

Wilson glanced about the room and took a chair. He was a little nervous, but seemed to feel that he really had no reason to be so. He offered Everhard a cigaret, and seemed surprised at the refusal, but struck a match with elaborate slowness, drew deeply and sighed.

"Why have they turned on me like this, Wilson? I played the game—but now I'm to be skinned alive."

Everhard pushed across the table a note sealed with skull and crossbones that had come to Gregg. No crude botch, that seal. A work of art.

"Don't ask me no questions, Colonel." Wilson spoke quickly. "I don't know. I got my orders. You know what I come for— But I don't."

"Then how can you know I'll be giving you the right amount?"

"Listen, Colonel. You're just to seal up whatever you give me. But you don't have to give *me* nothin'! Suit yourself. I'm not coaxin'. I won't do nothin' but say goodby. That's all."

Everhard opened a drawer and took out what looked to be a package of paper money. Wilson showed no eagerness at all, scarcely any interest.

"But, Wilson, you can make a pretty good guess at what's here?"

"I ain't guessin'. I'm a messenger boy, that's all. I just come to see you an' take what you give me."

"I suppose you won't tell me what you mean to do with me."

"You suppose correct, Colonel."

"Your day may come when they'll doublecross you, too, Wilson."

"I ain't takin' no chances, Colonel. I do what I'm told."

"Very well, then. Give me a receipt for fifty thousand dollars and I'll give you this package."

Up went the soft hand, palm outward.

"Not me! I don't know how much is there."

"Want to count it?"

"Not me! I wouldn't open that package for a hundred grand—not unless there was some way of gettin' to the moon."

"But I may be giving you scraps of paper, Wilson."

"I don't care what you're givin' me. That's your lookout. Mine is to get what you give me. I'm a messenger boy."

"Very well, but write some sort of receipt."

Wilson took a stubby fountain pen from his pocket and wrote:

Received from Col. Gregg a package, sealed.
—J. WILSON

"Date it," said Everhard.

He did, then pushed the receipt toward the package, making an exchange. He took the package, standing up.

" 'By, Colonel." He had a trace of swagger; not aggressive—just pleased with himself—and he gazed lingeringly at the bogus colonel's face in turning toward the doorway.

JAMES, burly and hard of face, stood in the doorway.

"All right, Wilson! Now talk to me. I'm J. K. James."

Wilson gulped as if trying to swallow a walnut and twisted about in a panicky impulse to run.

"Bolt if you want, Wilson. Men are

outside with hands out—to welcome you."

"I don't know nothin'. Not a thing! That's straight. But you, Colonel—I wouldn't be in your shoes for a million dollars!"

"Yours pinch as tight, Wilson." James had a merciless way of telling things to crooks. "Just suppose—suppose, you understand!—newspapers tomorrow morning say the police picked you up at the railroad station with a ticket for Chicago and fifty thousand dollars stuffed loosely in your pockets? And you couldn't explain where you got all that money?"

"You wouldn't frame me like that!"

"No? Guess again."

"But to frame me when I ain't done nothin'! I just come—"

"All right, then. Suppose you tell me when, where and to whom you are going to give that package?"

"I lose both ways."

"Not quite. You haven't threatened anybody. You're just the messenger boy. All I want is a chance at the man who is going to take this package. Then we'll put him through the hoops and make him lead us on to the next line. Give us that chance and you can clear out. Go to California, Mexico—China."

Wilson shook his head.

"Do me no good. They'd get me!"

"They won't get you in jail, eh?"

"Since when does the Secret Service frame guys?"

"Ask somebody that knows. I'm not—technically—of the Secret Service. I can cut the corners where those boys have to go clear around. Think fast, Wilson. What were you going to do with that package?"

Wilson threw the package at the table and sat down sullenly.

"An' if I tell you?" he asked, dry mouthed.

"You can catch the next train west—after we find you've told the truth."

"I ain't got a chance either way."

"Lots of people die of old age in California, Wilson."

"But there ain't much I can tell—honest. I was to go to my hotel an' at 11:30 drop it, or a letter with a weight tied to it, out o' my window. That's all I know, s'help me!"

"What hotel, what room, which window?"

"Saymore, 236. Window nearest the door. It's a back room."

James called in the men he had stationed about Gregg's house. He gave a man named Marks—who had much the same build as Wilson—the package and sent him to the Saymore.

The room overlooked an alley. The alley was dark. When James and his men got there shortly before eleven they couldn't see even bulky objects more than ten or fifteen feet off. They did not care to use flashlights to look about and get the lay of the land lest some watcher notice unusual movements. Two men quietly took up the watch on one side of the Saymore. Everhard and James waited on the other side. No one could enter or leave the alley without passing close to the watchers.

On the minute at 11:30 a package dropped from a window of the unlighted room No. 236. They waited for some slinking shape to come hurrying along. Five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen—a half hour.

"Something's wrong," said James. "No smart guy'll let fifty thousand dollars lie in this alley. They've wised up, somehow."

"Maybe Wilson handed you the wrong tip," Everhard suggested. "After you announced yourself, he knew there was no real money in that package."

"You make enough bad guesses to be a real detective," said James irritably. "That bird didn't hand me a bum steer. My business is to know when a guy's spilling beans— All right, boys," he called. "Turn on the light. Get the package, get Marks, and we'll go back and have some more conversation with Wilson."

Flashlights swept the alley inquiringly. Men moved about, searching.

"What's the matter down there?" Marks called from the unlighted window.

"It's gone!" said some one.

"The devil!" James hurried up. "Can't be. Nobody came into this alley."

He swept his flashlight along the rear of the Saymore, and swore.

There was a back door, half open. The window of No. 236, two floors up, was right in line with this door. Some one had been waiting and reached out, noiselessly. Then vanished a good half hour before.

That was all. The trail ended right there.

They went back to Colonel Gregg's library where Wilson waited under guard.

"Wilson," said James, sitting on the corner of the table as men grouped about, "let's have another talk."

Everhard, to safeguard his make-up, stood directly behind Wilson's chair.

"You've played square," said James. "But we fumbled."

"He got away!" Wilson was hopeful.

"Right. Clean. We didn't even ripple the water, so he's not wise to the little speech you made us. So far as you're concerned, you're in the clear. Gregg, here'll catch hell for passing you shredded newspaper. I said I'd let you bolt on the first train west. That goes—if you want it. But run, and your friends'll know you've pulled something. And if you try to go back to them, we'll tail you night and day. Make you useless. Make your friends afraid of you. Then they'll give you yours in a hurry. But why not play on our side? Do that, and we'll let you alone. Nobody'll guess. Just ease us a few tips now and then. We'll keep you in the clear. How about it?"

Wilson nodded, indecisive, but obviously tempted.

There was a crash of glass. Two shots fired rapidly came from an automatic through the broken window. Wilson pitched forward, dead, and Everhard had some of the white powder dusted out of his hair.

The phantom-like assassin instantly vanished from before the broken window.

They ran from the house, searching. Somewhere in the distance could be heard the diminishing sound of a racing automobile. No one caught sight of it. Probably the lights were out. Perhaps it had turned into a side street. Anyhow, it was gone.

James clapped a heavy hand on Everhard's arm.

"There you are! That's how fast La Tête de Mort works. Not an hour after the phony package was dropped they sent a killer up here to get Gregg. Saw Wilson. Maybe overheard what I'd just said to him. Nailed him first, then tried for you, thinking you were Gregg. It's a police case now."

The next morning the late editions of the newspapers carried the story of how a stranger named J. Wilson had been shot and killed instantly in the library of Colonel Milton P. Gregg, a wealthy and distinguished social figure; and of how the colonel himself had died a few minutes later at a private hospital as the result of a bullet from the same mysterious assassin.

CHAPTER II

THE KIDNAPERS

SIX weeks later a telegram reached Everhard in San Francisco. Laura James, the pretty, red headed wife of J. K, loved her notorious cousin without caring a snap whether he was as bad as some people said.

> DON PLEASE COME AT ONCE STOP DON'T LET ANY ONE KNOW I SENT FOR YOU STOP JIMMY NEEDS YOU STOP FOR MY SAKE COME STOP IT'S THAT TERRIBLE PARIS THING AGAIN STOP YOU MUST COME STOP.
>
> —LAURA

Laura was not a foolishly excitable girl. Everhard knew that James couldn't need him, not in his work—no more than an extra thumb; but he thought perhaps Laura did.

In Washington, Everhard registered as usual under another name. Twenty minutes later, James, having entered the hotel by a back way, was in the room. He had lost weight, looked haggard, but his muscular jaws hadn't weakened.

"How the hell did you know I wanted you?" James growled, holding tightly to Everhard's hand.

"Not eating. No sleep. Look like a sore tailed bear. What's wrong?"

"Huh. On the quiet I'm taking a correspondence course in detecting. Looks like a flunk. Takes brains to be a detective."

"Sit down."

Everhard pulled a chair forward. James pushed it back. He reached in his pocket for a cigaret, found one with the tobacco half sifted out, bit off the end. He changed his mind and threw the cigaret away.

"The Washburn kidnaping?" James growled questioningly.

"Yes. Been reading about it."

"Here's something you haven't read about it. La Tête de Mort's got Judge Washburn's little girl. And we are helpless. Skull and crossbones seal. Envelop and paper, good bond in general use. Typed on a standard portable. Letter mailed in New York. There. I've told you as much about what we've got to work on as anybody knows."

"Excepting the amount of the ransom."

"That's the secret. Guess your head off and you'd never name it. By the Lord, in Rome's greatest days Judge Washburn would have been a noble Roman! Listen, Don—you like to hear about guts. They are demanding that a Federal judge decide the Helio Motor case in favor of the defendants! And the defendants are honest men. They've nothing to do with it. It's stock gamblers, waiting to play the margin. Clean up millions. Our only chance to spot 'em would be after the decision. And here's what Washburn says: 'Though half the people of America perish, and my own family among them, it were better than that criminal terrorism dictate the decisions of the Federal courts.'"

James glowered and held up a forefinger.

"There is one they can't scare or buy. He's going to withdraw from the case. Says he can't give a fair hearing under the circumstances. That's the same as a refusal. And they'll kill the child. You've read how they killed the chauffeur who was bringing her from school—so he couldn't give a description."

"Needless to ask if the stock gamblers who might be interested are watched?"

"Watched! Lord, yes! But that's only half my troubles. Right after the Gregg thing I got a package of money. A couple of years' salary. A skull and crossbones seal on the inside wrapper. Not a word. Just that—and plenty. 'Take our money and lay off—or take the other thing!' No way to return it. I sent it to a children's clinic in New York."

Everhard put out his hand and silently held up two fingers.

James slapped at the fingers and shook his head.

"No. They've got me scared!"

"I can't guess that one," said Everhard, skeptical.

"Right after I sent the money to the clinic, a bullet shattered the mirror one night as Laura stood undressing. No clew. Maybe they were just trying to scare me out of the game. I don't know. They did scare me out of the house we rented and into an apartment. I've pleaded with her, but she won't leave town. You talk to her. Get her to go back to California. Say her mother's dying—say anything. I can't leave her here alone—and I have to be in New York."

"No use," said Everhard. "She comes from the stubborn side of the family—the women are all stubborn."

"I know what you mean. She won't

cut and run. But talk to her."

What Laura said when Everhard talked to her alone was:

"I'll not go. That's all. I won't. You can stay here and look after me. That's why I wired. There's an apartment just across the hall for rent, and I've paid a deposit on it."

James came into the room. His knees were weak and he staggered. His lips quivered as if words wouldn't come as he stared at them.

Laura threw her arms about his neck, fearful that he was wounded. He pushed her away with rough gentleness.

"The Washburn child—wrapped in a blanket. Dead. Beat to death. Word's just come from New York. A milkman found the body. Not a clue!"

He stood brooding, then half turned and shouted—

"Loo Sung!"

The Chinaman came running.

"Throw a clean collar in my bag—" James stooped to kiss his wife. "Plane's ordered. I'm leaving for New York—now."

NEARLY all of the facts about the Washburn case were kept out of the papers. The country was in a bad state of nerves, anyhow; and if the truth had come out, every little tinhorn blackmailer and terrorist would have reaped a harvest by scrawling skulls on threatening letters.

Scarcely any of James' associates would believe that the head of skull and crossbones gang could be in Paris. And for some reason, perhaps because they felt it would be a reflection on their own ability, nearly all of the police detectives pooh-poohed the idea of a great criminal organization.

James telephoned every day, and at the end of a week told his wife almost with triumph in his voice—

"We've got something at last . . . "

Three days later Everhard happened to be alone in the room when the James mail was slipped under the door. He picked it up, glanced idly at the two letters, then felt suspiciously of one. It was addressed to Mrs. James.

Everhard opened it and found he had guessed right. There was the Death's Head seal. Good bond paper. Good clean typing. A laconic note:

> Dear Mrs. James: Unless your husband lets up on the Washburn case we will give him one of his own to work on. You will be next. Tell him so.

Everhard put the letter into his pocket and said nothing. He began spending even more time, night and day, in James' apartment. Laura tried to quarrel because he would not let her go out for fresh air or shopping; but he stayed exasperatingly good natured and firm.

It was just about a week after the letter came that James telephoned he would be home by midnight, having some work to do at Washington.

That evening at dinner there was wine on the table. Everhard put a hand over his glass as the Chinaman started to pour it. He never drank.

"Since when," he asked, "have you been fooling with bootleggers?"

"I should say not!" Laura said. "This may be a wee bit wrong, but some of Jimmy's friends at the embassies—they've the right to it, you know—send over a bottle now and then."

Ten minutes later Laura yawned, murmuring—

"Don't know why I'm so sleepy tonight."

She rubbed her eyes, shook her head, then sighed and lay back drowsily.

Everhard pushed back his chair and went to her. She moved a little, letting her head fall against him. He shook her. She was out, dead to the world.

He rang the buzzer, watching the pantry doorway. No answer. He went quietly to the kitchen and looked in. The Chinaman sat at a table with head down on folded arms. An empty water glass was on the table. Everhard smelled of it. Loo Sung had taken a little wine, too.

Everhard shook him, jerked him back, pinched him, lifted his eyelids and jabbed a finger almost against an eyeball. But the Chinaman was really out, not pretending.

He went back to the dinner table, picked up the bottle of wine, looked at it against the light, smelled it, put it down. He knew nothing of wines, but realized that somebody must have made a good job of this, since Laura, who was particular about flavors, had not noticed anything wrong.

Twenty minutes later the telephone rang. He went to it, lifted his hand, then let it drop. He eyed the phone as if it were a suspicious person, smiled a little and turned away with a backward glance, saying quietly:

"Yes, we've all passed out. There's nobody here to answer."

He filled his own wine glass, emptied most of it around a potted fern and replaced the glass by his plate. He brought Laura in from the couch where he had carried her and put her in the chair at the table, letting her lean forward, cheek down on the cloth.

Everhard took both his automatics from their holsters, slipped them into side coat pockets and sat down in a chair near a corner. He tried various positions, but in all of them kept a hand on a gun.

Presently there was light tiptoeing in the kitchen, hushed whispering, then nervous chuckling and louder tones as the men who came in felt more assurance.

Everhard eyed them from under nearly closed eyelids. They looked surprisingly young and were sleekly dressed. Their eyes had the glazed stare of men who are uneasy. One had lumpy cheek bones, the other was much smaller and thin of face.

"Who's that guy?" said the lumpy faced one, startled.

"Some bird staked out here to see that we didn't come."

"Oughtn't we do something to him?"

"We come for her. Let's get 'er an' get goin'. That'll be doin' enough to him."

"But listen—nobody mentioned this bozo."

"He's out, ain't he? Not worth mentionin'. Take them rings off her an'—"

"Get 'em up!" said Everhard, rising.

They spun about like a pair of jumping jacks jerked on one wire. Each looked into an automatic, but they got their real warning from the eyes above the guns. Their arms, which had instinctively crooked toward shoulder holsters, dropped. Then in silence both slowly began to raise their hands.

"What's it all about?" Everhard asked.

"W-why, we're—we're burglars!" said the lumpy faced one.

"Y-yeah!" said the other.

"You guessed wrong," Everhard said. "You're not going to jail. You're going to try to escape. Your being hooked up with the Washburn case is all that's needed to get my picture in the papers."

"Washburn case!"

"Listen—get us straight," Lumpy begged. "We don't know nothin' about the Washburn case. We was in a jam in New York an' Skinny—"

"That's out!" Skinny snarled. "Shut your trap!"

"You," Everhard directed Skinny, "step over there to the table. Take a drink. Use a water glass. To the brim. That or the morgue. And if you open your trap, I'll know which you want."

Skinny poured wine into a water glass, eyeing Everhard. He sipped suspiciously with one hand in the air, the other holding the glass. He thought about chancing the draw, but drank instead.

The skinny one soon began to blink and sway a little. There was quick action dope in the wine, and he had put down a double dose.

Everhard stepped near him, dropped a gun into his own pocket, jerked one from the fellow's shoulder holster and gave him a push toward a chair. The man sat down heavily, threw his head back, rubbed at his eyes with a lax wrist, mumbled vaguely and was still.

"Now, you—you've been sent to carry off this drugged girl. Who sent you?"

"I don't know!" protested the lumpy faced man desperately. "That's straight, s'help me!"

"I know you don't. You get orders out of the dark. You're just messenger boys, eh? Where were you taking her? Tell me the truth and you'll have a chance. Lie to me, and you're out—cold—for keeps. Try it and see."

Lumpy was a weak sister. Everhard had spotted that.

"W-we was to take her—I can't tell you! They'll kill me!"

"What do you think I'm going to do if you don't? You didn't take quite enough cocaine for this job. But you won't talk? Suits me."

"I'll—I'll talk. We was to take her across the river, out a country road, leave her behind a tree in the grass. Then keep goin'. That's all I know. I—I'm tellin' it all."

Everhard walked over to him, jerked his gun from its holster, ran his hands over the fellow's body; then:

"Get busy. Tear the clothes off that pal of yours."

"What!"

Lumpy undressed his companion. Everhard tossed him some of Laura's clothes, and watched him sweat and heard stitches rip as he pulled them over the pal's unconscious body. Even silk stockings—new ones. They tore, but it didn't matter. Laura's slippers wouldn't fit the man's feet, so they were left off. A tight fitting woman's hat was jammed over the drugged man's head.

"What were you planning to say if you met anybody on the way down?" Everhard asked.

"Put 'em in the air and crack their head. All we wanted was a minute start."

"Good. I'll see that we get it. Anybody at the wheel down there?"

"N-no. Just us two."

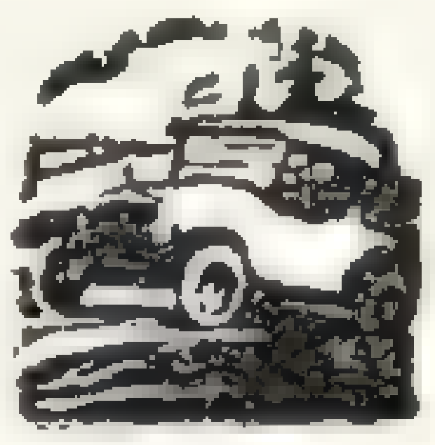
"Pick him up and let's go."

Lumpy struggled clumsily, getting the unconscious man on to his shoulder. In the kitchen Everhard snatched some dish towels in passing. They went the back way, down three flights of stairs, and met no one. A coupé was at the side street curb. Lumpy staggered out hurriedly. Everhard lifted the lid of the luggage compartment. They crammed the body in.

The car started. Everhard said:

"Now take it easy. Traffic cops are smart. Talk nice to 'em and they guess you're hiding something. And they'd like a bottle of it for themselves and search the car. Talk hard, and you have bad luck too. Go slow."

Lumpy's foot trembled so that he had to use the gas lever at the wheel to keep the car running evenly, and his breathing sounded as if he had a fishbone stuck in his throat.



THE road they were on curved into a wooded district that looked lonely. They met a car now and then, and one or two overtook and passed them.

"Lot of trees out this way. Be sure you get the right one," said Everhard.

"We looked it over today. Got a cigar sign on it. Right around a bend here close. Somebody's been startin' a ditch near there. It's right along here."

The car slowed down and crept along.

"That's it!" said Lumpy, and drove to the side of the road.

The motor was left running. They got out, with Everhard's hand on Lumpy's shoulder as he followed, squeezing past the wheel. He pushed Lumpy before him around behind the tree. It was very dark.

"We was to leave 'er and go!" said Lumpy.

They dragged the body out. The dress tore under the tugging pulls. Everhard made sure that the woman's hat was pulled low and firmly over the unconscious man's face. Lumpy had the nervous strength of one in haste. He carried the man in his arms and flung the body down in the tall, dry grass. It was very dark in the wooded shadows.

They got into the car and started up with a long, speedy grind in second, went into high and took a sharp curve.

"Slow down," said Everhard. "Throw her into low."

"You're crazy!"

"That's been said before. Do as you're told."

"What the hell?" Lumpy's voice had a bleating whine. He brought the car to a jerky stop. "You won't do that to me after I've played square an'—"

"If you have played square, you can die of old age for all I care—in the pen, though. Into low. Pull off the road. Smash through those bushes."

The car, with a snapping crackle, ran deep into a hazel thicket, and Everhard said:

"All right. Come along out."

"Y-you goin' to give me the works?"

"Give you nothin'. I'm Scotch. Out you come."

Everhard left him securely gagged and tied with dish towels, and went around the bend to where the body had been left.

He crouched in the shadows across the road, getting well down behind a bush in the grass. Cars very seldom passed.

Everhard waited, patiently, now and then cautiously changing position. An hour passed. Everhard rubbed a cramped knee and stretched his legs, then squatted, ready to wait another hour—or till sunrise.

He saw a headlight glancing far up the road. It came slowly, as when a driver looks carefully for a rather unfamiliar landmark. It was barely creeping along as it drew near, and there was a side sweep of a flashlight. The flashlight struck and paused on the cigar sign on the tree, then the beam reached toward the back of the tree and moved on back away from the road.

The car was a low slung, long hooded roadster. It stopped under the tree. The lights went off. A man got out. The engine idled as he raised the hood, flashing the light into it as if looking for motor trouble. The light had crossed the seat of the roadster and Everhard could see that the man had come alone. He did not seem in the least hurried.

The man moved around behind the tree with the flashlight on the ground. Everhard thought that he would return and open the baggage compartment before he brought the body, and so hesitated to cross the road.

Then he realized that the man had picked up the body and was going away from the car, tramping through the grass. There was a soft thud as if a sack of rubbish had been dropped, and a moment later the scrape of a shovel and the soft sound of loose dirt.

What the fellow did with the shovel when he had finished, Everhard did not know. Perhaps simply pitched it away into the bushes. He came toward the car, unhurriedly, just like an honest laborer, glad that a dirty job was over.

"What the hell?" he grumbled vaguely, noticing that the engine was silent, and stopped in his tracks, momentarily suspicious. His flashlight played over the car. He stooped, and shot the light under the car, looking for feet. But Everhard was crouched on the running board. "Died on me," the fellow mumbled, reassuringly.

His voice was husky as if he had a sore throat. He got in from the right side, squeezed in behind the wheel, switched on the headlights and stepped on the starter. There was just a dead whir. The engine had not died. Everhard had shut it off. The fellow grumbled again and turned on the switchboard light. He saw that the engine had been switched off; he stiffened, not moving. Slowly, cautiously, he turned his head.

"Keep 'em on the wheel," said Everhard.

"Say, look here! Who—"

A bad one, this fellow. Cold as steel. He wasn't tall, but had a big man's sloping, thick shoulders. Good clothes, better than good, and tailored to glove his odd body. Diamonds glittered on thick, short fingers.

He straightened slowly, drew a deep breath and said:

"Listen, brother. I don't know how you guessed, but that mail sack I just cached—you're in on it, and I'm out! That's the way this game works. I'll dig it up for you. Then you can take it and do the worrying!"

"Not a bad stall for one that you had to think up fast," said Everhard. "But this isn't what you think. I've got bad news for you. Ever hear of a little decoration called the doublecross? Dead men wear it!"

"Me! On the spot!"

"Why not?"

"After all I've done!"

"Maybe they want what you've done kept a secret."

"Me!"

"Maybe I'll get mine next," said Everhard. "But just now it's your turn. That's the hell of working for men that keep behind curtains. We can't strike back. Have to do as told. All right, come on out of there. I don't want to mess up the car!"

"Holy Mother, can't you give me a break? Nobody'll know—I'll duck!"

"Not a chance—unless you can put me on to who the hell it is that gives us orders. I'd like to know."

"You're a dick!" said the fellow huskily.

"Yes? You're wonderful, you are. A detective would have let you beat that woman's head in and bury her, wouldn't he? No wonder they want you out of the way. Anybody dumb as that."

A long pause. The fellow swallowed hard.

"You win," he grumbled. "But, hell, you can't carry a full grown woman about and hide her places."

"Not like a child—no," Everhard agreed.

"What do you mean?"

"Just what you think."

"Oh. Then they told you!"

He wet his thick lips with a dry tongue. He swore vaguely.

"How'd the Death's Head come to take an interest in you, anyhow?" Everhard asked.

"I was in jail—for a sort of fight."

"With a woman?"

"Oh, I killed 'er all right. Police nailed me. I alibied like hell, but it wasn't so good. They rode me hard. Didn't let me sleep for a week. But I stuck. Then damned if they didn't say, 'Sorry, Pete; but we thought we had you dead to rights. But a nigger done it. A tip's just come in. We've got the goods on him!' Turned me loose. And the nigger went to the hot seat. Then I got me a letter—and money in it. It said for me to show some gratitude and play the game. I burned it, like I was told. Since then I've done what I was told. No matter what. Now on the spot—me!"

"You've made money. Had work you liked. Nice easy life. They knew a man who'd beat a woman to death would enjoy the sort of things they wanted done! Come out of that car."

"You going to kill me?"

"No, I won't—unless you ask for it. I'll give you a break. Back out of there with your fingers on your ears."

The fellow came. Everhard stood behind him with one hand on his collar.

"Drop your arms."

They dropped, and Everhard pulled the coat down off the fellow's shoulders, half off him, then said—

"Now lift your arms, high as you can." He could only move them up at the elbows. "Hold 'em there."

Everhard took away the man's gun and tossed it on to the seat. He reached in, groping backward, and took up the flashlight that lay on the seat, stuck it into a hip pocket; then from behind the man searched his trousers pockets, getting the key purse. He pushed the fellow around to the back of the roadster.

The luggage compartment was not locked. Everhard shook off the man's coat and made him climb in and lower the door on himself. Then Everhard locked it, took up the coat, shook off the dust and, sitting in the car under the switchboard light, examined the contents of the pockets.

He found letters, one addressed and ready for mailing to J. K. James. Others, three or four, from silly women addressed to Mr. Peter Tomas, 180 Pullic Street, New York City. Among the stuff taken from the fellow was a .38 automatic, a heavy blackjack, supple as a snake, a small manicure set, address book, chewing gum.

The roadster had Pennsylvania license plates, with a New York set under the seat. Cigars and road maps were in the door pockets.

Everhard started up the car, turning around. He had not forgotten the lumpy faced man, but didn't want to be bothered with small fry.

EVERHARD got back to Washington about midnight. He stopped at a drug store and telephoned James' apartment. James answered. Everhard then very quietly hung up, saying nothing. He had learned what he wanted to know.

Fifteen minutes later Everhard entered his own apartment, quickly washed up, changed his clothes and crossed the hall.

James opened the door, gave him one searching look from head to feet.

"What the hell happened?" he barked.

"How's Laura?"

"The doctor brought her around, but she's blank on this—" James waved a hand. "Men's clothes—her dresses scattered. Loo Sung out cold—and you gone. Can't you talk?"

"I'll talk, all right. I've got news. But remember, I'm out of the picture. I don't know how you'll work it, and I don't care. My name's not to be mentioned and I don't show in court. That a bargain?"

James eyed him.

"You've played hell somehow. But you wouldn't put me in a jam. Tell it all."

"This is more than a guess," said Everhard. "The man that killed the Washburn child is Pete Tomas, 180 Pullic Street, New York."

"You know it? It's your own idea—not something you've heard?"

"Mine."

James surged toward the telephone. Everhard caught at his shoulder.

"Out o' the way, Don. I want long distance."

"Save the toll. Pete's down in a car, alone. Waiting for you."

"Dead, then."

"No—locked in the back of a roadster. Here are the keys. Everything else I took off him is on the floor of the car. Except this letter. It's for you. Take the stamp off carefully and you can use it again."

James glanced at him questioningly. Everhard's face was not easy to read.

James cut the envelop carefully, took out the letter and read with a grim look. He held out the letter, holding it carefully by the corners.

> Dear Mr. James: Your wife is safe and will be given every courtesy if you lay off the Washburn case.

Everhard nodded. Their eyes met. James took a deep breath.

"They were after her? I half guessed it when I saw these men's clothes." James folded the letter, replaced it in the envelop and put it in an inside pocket. "Can't you see I'm listening?"

"What if they'd got her? Then you received this letter?"

"Do you really need to ask that?" said James quietly, with tightening of heavy jaws.

"Don't you ask lots of things when you know the answer? The man that wore Laura's clothes—I don't know whether Pete Tomas beat him to death or not; but if not, he was buried alive. And Tomas still thinks it was Laura."

James growled and lifted his fists, swore, dropped his head. He turned away as if dizzy, then spun about as if half angry.

"And you won't let your name appear in this? Why do you want to be a damn violet? You've got no more modesty than a hoot owl. And you're not afraid of all the Death's Heads this side of hell. Come clean. What's up? I can fix it no matter how many you shot. Get you medals for it. Say something!"

Everhard looked at him.

"I'm going to Paris. That is, if you'll put me through as a big crook that's on the run, and if you think your friend who's making the fight would be willing for me to have a try at it."

James, not wanting to show what he felt, began to slap his pockets.

"Why the hell don't you smoke?" He found a cigaret, but snapped it between his fingers. "Don, I'll make you out the biggest crook that ever talked to a lawyer. Lord, but I'm shaky tonight. And listen. If by any chance we can hook this Pete Tomas up with a certain wall eyed broker, who ought to be hanged because he's got a mug the noose was invented to frame—then we'll get somewhere. He's big—too big to monkey with unless you wear mittens. But—the Lord help me if I pull a boner!—I'm sending a troupe of safecrackers against his private can! But I've got to get to that Pete Tomas."

James snatched up his hat.

"Aren't you coming?"

"No. I've just told you why I can't show in the picture."

"You're right. I'm goofy tonight. Go in and kiss my wife for me. That's the biggest favor I can grant any man—damn you!"

He laughed and slammed the door.

CHAPTER III

ALIAS MR. BURNETT

ANY one interested in how James fixed it so that Everhard's name did not appear can go to the newspaper files. The lumpy faced man was eager for a lifetime security in prison and pleaded guilty to murders that he perhaps had nothing to do with. Peter Tomas refused to confess, even after his house at 180 Pullic Street had been searched and a school pin belonging to the Washburn child had been found. Some big lawyers suddenly took an interest in his case, and pow-wowing alienists were all set to swear that a man who had tried frantically to hide his crimes did not know right from wrong; but Tomas hanged himself in his cell. It was suspected that a guard had smuggled in the rope and told Tomas to use it—probably giving him a little help.

It was only a few days after Tomas was caught that the Wattison story broke in New York.

Wattison was a broker with vast offices. A high flyer in the underworld, or at least night world. A shady bird who liked bright lights. Police captains called him Tom. So did half the after-dark blondes of Broadway.

Wattison was lean, with narrow, pinched eyes, a twisted scar of a mouth and a low, jerky voice. Half the little finger of his left hand was missing. He was never drunk. He did not use dope. He was as cold as most dead men. The night birds eyed him, mystified, for he wasn't the type. He wasted money like a sucker, and kept his mouth shut, yet seemed to dread being alone.

One morning about 4:30 a pop-eyed, pale faced broker's clerk—without tie or collar, which showed he had started off in a hurry—ended his zig-zag taxi trail from one night club to another and came upon Wattison at what is called the cuff's table of an upstairs party place where things were going on that you don't read about.

A bouncer had a hand on the clerk's elbow, ready to throw him out unless he made good his story that he had news Wattison must hear.

Wattison twisted his ropy neck in a sidewise stare, saw who it was, pushed a girl off his knee and stood up.

"Well, Carter?"

"They gagged our night watchman—cut the wires—and your private safe, sir! That's all they touched. Bill worked out of the ropes, telephoned the police, then telephoned all of us of the office force that he could get. He said you had to know, sir. Said you'd said if ever anything like that was tried, you were to be found and told, day or night, sir."

"My own safe, eh?"

"Bill says they cleaned it, sir."

Wattison didn't bat an eye. He stood still and stared vaguely at a pair of girls who were frisking in a confetti snowstorm; but he didn't see them. He kept on looking blankly at the same spot after they had moved away. He shook himself, or maybe shivered; but he didn't say a word. He drew a roll of money and tossed some bills at the table, waved the collarless clerk aside when he started to follow, left the place without opening his mouth—and disappeared completely.

"DON, my boy," said James, patting some stuff that had come from Wattison's safe. "I've got the one essential fundamental characteristic that makes a great detective."

"Bluff, eh?"

"No. Luck. Give me luck—other dicks can have the brains. See here. All his records were on flimsy paper. Not much to 'em. Kept most of it in his head. But if he'd had ten minutes' tip that we were coming—even if we'd been in the outer office!—he'd have burned this stuff in his nice little marble fireplace, and whacked the keys of that portable typewriter with a file. Then where'd we have been?"

"But what did your safecrackers get out of it?"

"Get? They got bales of money. So much they thought it was counterfeit!"

"How'd you spot Wattison?"

"Hate to tell you. Took so little brains. We knew the Washburn thing was a stock gamble. Knew also it had to be somebody that took orders from Paris. We went over all the brokers that had a Paris hookup. A lot of 'em. Wattison was one. He looked as O. K. as the others. I visited 'em all. But Wattison roamed the joy joints of jazz town—and never let himself go. Always cold. Sober. I said to myself, 'That bird isn't happy. He's scared stiff. Let's have a look-see.' I got to his cables. Code. Found some of them came from persons that couldn't be checked. I hollered to my Monsieur X of Paris.

"He said Wattison's connections in Paris were certainly open to suspicion. So I called on Wattison. Said I wanted him to help me spot the gamblers that had tried to break Judge Washburn. He said he would, and wished me luck. Nice of him, wasn't it? But he was smart. He knew my eye was on him. That letter telling Laura to tell me to lay off came right after my visit to him. All good detectives can count up to ten—at least on their fingers. So I counted up all I had on him, and took a chance.

"Doubt if we'll catch him, though he's known by sight to a lot of stools that would turn in their own mothers for thirty cents. First joint's gone off his little finger. But he's smart. No doubt he had a big cache somewhere, and is still richer than most of the world's honest men. But he can't go far. When once you fail the crowd presided over by M. La Tête de Mort of gay Paree, you're done, through, all in and out—a dead one, or soon will be. And you haven't seen anything yet. Look what I've found."

James picked up a small box and laid it before Everhard.

"Look and see what I'm going to have made into a medal to wear on my undershirt!"

It was the Death's Head seal. In the same box was a finger ring with skull and crossbones design.

James chuckled.

"We can go in for blackmail now. We've got the sucker list and the dohickus. Even the wax. Too damn bad there wasn't a list of the tried and true agents that we could use."

"But he couldn't have hidden this seal, or burned it, while you were kicking on his door."

"Bright boy! Children do ask the queerest questions! He couldn't have shied it out of his tenth story window? If ever found, who'd have pinned it on him?" James picked up the finger ring. "This would have been harder to ditch. Take a look."

The ring was of platinum. A death's head was framed by crossbones that formed a triangle on each side and merged into a band. A thing of macabre art and, like the seal, beautifully wrought. The little platinum skull had empty eye sockets, a hollow nose and a lipless mouth filled with teeth.

"Look!" James pried up the skull's chin. The death's face lifted like a lid and disclosed a tiny miniature. "That's Wattison's mug. You're great on art—or make us lowbrows think you are. What of this?"

"I never saw such eyes. They look alive and—"

"Right. The artist looked inside of Wattison and painted the truth! It's frightful. Unlike him—yet like you know he is."

"What does the ring mean?"

"There you go, trying to show me up. I don't know. But I'll guess with you. I'd say the picture serves as a sort of passport. I've shown these things—the ring and seal—to museum sharks. Told 'em nothing. Just listened. They went goofy. Said it was big time stuff. Said no known miniaturist, dead, alive, or yet to be born, could touch this bird. Get me? Real art! And I'm wondering like hell about something. Can you guess?"

"Easy."

"All right—tell it to me. I want to hear how my thoughts sound in somebody else's mouth."

"This Death's Head is a crime thing. As bad as you ever heard of." James nodded approval. "So you're popeyed as to why an artist, a real genius in art, is mixed up with blackmail, terrorism, murder. So?"

"You've got it. No wonder nobody can play poker with you. Damn mind reader! Get this. You've already got it, but I'm going to make my little speech anyhow. The mysterious gink who's the real head of La Tête de Mort appreciates the genius of his artist. Otherwise any botch of a seal, any dodad of a ring, any two-bit snapshot, would serve as well. I get the feeling and get it strong—" James studied the miniature—"that the old murder boy had a devil's insolence and humor to make Wattison keep, and sometimes show, a picture like this of himself. The more you look at it, the more it looks like him. He knows what's inside of a man. And when you work up to where they give you a ring, I want to see it. Some things about you I'd like to know. You're the sort of egg that's suitable for a bad first night, Don, yet dogs and children like you!

"Now listen some more. The story I'm framing on you is going to break in about three weeks at San Francisco. It'll make Al Capone look like a piker. All the bad girls in Paris'll have their arms out, welcomingly. And get this—keep it, too. When you get to Paris, don't try to guess which are your friends and which are Death's Headers. Both sides'll be trying you out, watching every move. On top of that, the police themselves will be damned suspicious and keep an eye on you. Remember, too, there's probably more agents of the police taking orders from La Tête de Mort than are taking 'em from my friend Monsieur X, who is going to take you to pieces and inspect head, heart and guts to see what you're made of before he'll back you up in this game.

"He's cautious and he's thorough. He'll pull stunts on you and have you watched night and day. Looking for your weak spots. He's a better detective than I am, so he'll probably find some. And if the Death's Heads get a glimmer of suspicion that you are trying to horn in on them, your future address will be hell.

"One word more. The wisest of all. Look out for the ladies. French women can do things to you that the Hollywood dames are too bashful to try!"

YOU may or may not recall the sensational confessions of one Captain Bill Broad from a San Francisco jail where, with a bad outlook before him, he said he was going to come clean and spill it all. He was a hard boiled rum runner, had been in the game for years; but he got religion or something and said he, and a dozen others like him, had never done anything but take orders from Don Everhard who was, and long had been, secretly in control of the hijackers of the high seas.

A lot of waterfront roustabouts—most of them merely wanting their names in the paper—said the same thing. Headlines blazed all over the country. The sort of fiction writers who are called correspondents soon made out that Everhard was a ruthless pirate, ruling the Pacific from Seattle to San Diego.

An old ex-chief of police of San Francisco called it all a lot of hooey; said Everhard had raised hell a-plenty there and elsewhere, giving big shot gamblers the jimjams and confidence men sad stories to tell.

"But nobody can make me believe," said the old ex-chief, "that Everhard ever took a dime out of traffic in booze, dope or women."

Such papers as carried the ex-chief's statement gave it a few lines in an obscure corner.

Reporters everywhere searched for Everhard; but he had vanished. So everybody said Bill Broad's story must have a lot of truth in it, since Everhard had been driven into hiding.

It was at this time, the latter part of September, that the *Trivilia,* a slow cabin boat, sailed from New York.

Shortly before midnight a passenger wearing gray tweeds and walking with a decided limp came on board. He was down on the purser's list as Robert Burnett, and went at once to his stateroom without at all noticing a dark eyed girl who stood alone in the shadows near the gangway and scrutinized every man who came on the ship.

In his stateroom, Mr. Burnett found a big basket of fruit and a thick bundle of books and magazines. The gift card on the fruit basket said, "Hope you get seasick—J. K. J."

Everhard took an apple, bit into it, sat down and, holding the apple in one hand, removed his shoe. He rubbed the sole of his foot, put the apple aside and fished about in the shoe for a dried pea. He carefully split the pea in two and tossed half of it away.

He undressed slowly, eating another apple, and opened the suitcase and tossed pajamas toward the bed, then examined half idly the two extra passports in the flap of the suitcase.

He opened the magazine bundle. James had a lot of illustrated magazines sent to him from Germany, England and France. Said he liked to look at pictures, and some day he hoped to learn to read.

Everhard turned out all lights but the reading lamp by the head of the bed, propped himself on pillows and idly turned the pages of a French magazine, pausing to look at a layout of pretty girls. There was one bizarre creature on this page whom he recognized. *"La femme sans cœur"*. That was a sort of trade name for Isobel de Nevers. It was considered bad luck to fool with her since, having no heart, she didn't care what happened to you. A notorious woman, never seen except in a huge golden wig, a wax-like mask of powder and bespangled gowns. Theatrical critics tore their hair because during the past year she had been put on the vaudeville stage in a little singing act, and crowds went to see her—to the neglect of high minded actresses.

Everhard drowsily pushed the magazine aside, reached up to the light and, though the gong was pounding and people calling, went to sleep.

CHAPTER IV

THE GIRL IN THE DECK CHAIR

EVERHARD lay in a deck chair with French magazines scattered over the rug, when a blue eyed, fat bellied young man in knickers, cap and rattlesnake stockings paused importantly to ask:

"We're getting up a ten dollar pool. Want in?"

"Thanks, but I never indulge in hazards of any kind. Very bad," Everhard suggested reprovingly.

The fat youth eyed the magazine covers and grinned broadly.

"I bet you've never been in Paris, now, have you?"

"But I have read of it."

The fat youth sank both hands into his coat pockets and teetered back on his heels.

"Say, but wouldn't I like to take you out some night and show you things! That's one town I know, brother."

The fat youth glanced quickly at the drowsy girl in the chair beside Everhard's, saw she was interested, so he gave his cap a pull, teetered some more, tipped her a wink and inquired—

"By the way, brother, what's your line back in God's country?"

Everhard turned a page, not looking up.

"I've never been in Judea."

The drowsy girl laughed softly. The fat youth looked blank. His ears suddenly grew pink.

"Huh," he said, and stalked off.

"Nice," the drowsy girl murmured, invitingly.

The drowsy girl was huddled cocoonlike on her chair, like a sleeping kitten. Tam, veil, shawl and rug concealed everything but the tip of a nose, a red mouth and dark, moist eyes.

Everhard got the impression that she was very young. It being the morning of the first day out, he had no idea at all of what she was like, but thought there ought to be a papa and mama somewhere near. A scraggly graybeard in heavy dark glasses, gloved hands holding the rug about his neck, and a stout, motherly woman, had the chairs on the other side of her. He, without any thought in the matter, took it for granted they were her grandparents.

"Thank you," he said without interest. "Have a magazine?"

She did not stir, but murmured—

"You are very kind."

"And you are French?"

Her drowsy eyes widened. Her head stirred negatively.

"No—Roumanian."

"That's fine. So am I."

He knew no more Roumanian than a stevedore knows Sanskrit, but did know some Chinese phrases, and rattled them at her.

She laughed.

"I am French, yes. But I hoped my accent wasn't that bad."

"You have no accent, child. You merely have the lilt."

"Child!" playfully but earnest: "I'm a divorcée!"

"Isn't that too bad? And you seem such a nice girl, too."

He picked up another magazine, ignoring her friendliness. She could have the deck chair put elsewhere, and so try again. He wished her all that sort of luck that she wanted. The fat bellied youth would be glad to play with her.

Five minutes later Everhard, in changing magazines, glanced at her. She lay motionless, a huddled kitten, drowsily peering at him. The red lips twitched faintly, and one eyelid fluttered. There was no lost motion in her technique.

He shook his head.

"You heard what I told the fat boy?"

"You never never take chances of any kind?" Her voice was very soft.

"The fat boy likes to gamble."

She replied with a tiny shake of her head and smiled, but gave him an oddly tense look, as if she searched to see what could possibly be wrong with her strategy.

"Coward!" she whispered, laughing.

Everhard came upon another article about Isobel de Nevers. This was rather lengthy, with impatient penciled notations in James' hand on the margin. It appeared that this bizarre woman interested James very much. Opposite the criticism that she could not act was the notation, "The hell she can't." There was a closeup of her face. The wig was said to be a fluff of spun gold. Her eyelids were purple as if grapestained, the face wax-like. Only the devil would know what she really looked like with makeup off. Her smile had a definite lure, but her eyes seemed to be giving an honest warning.

Everhard suddenly turned the magazine over, looking at the date. It was six months old.

"I see," Everhard mused. "But if you think I'm going to try to reach the Death's Head by playing with this vamp of his, you guessed wrong. I'm strong enough to know my weaknesses. Nice little hint you've given!"

THE luncheon gong sounded. Everhard got up and gathered his magazines into the seat of the chair. The drowsy girl still watched him.

"Not eating?"

"Not yet," she said. "It's the smells. Bad sailor."

"You're bad all right," he thought, unreproachfully, and pointed to the magazines. "Help yourself."

A murmur of thanks drifted after him as he limped away, thumping the deck with rubber tipped cane.

Everhard had breakfasted alone, with three empty chairs bespeaking queaziness. Now a little fat red faced man and a fat little white faced woman were at the table, ready to gamble with food. Introductions passed.

"One down!" said the little fat man, pointing at the empty chair.

He somehow seemed proud that somebody else was more seasick than he.

Halfway through lunch the little fat woman grew whiter of face and gasped. She struggled weakly to get off the chair and waddled away with a tense, preoccupied stare straight ahead, as if she knew exactly what she was going to do. George went too, begging her in a tense whisper to wait—wait. So Everhard had all the iced olives to himself.

When he returned on deck, the drowsy girl was almost sitting up. She held a magazine open at the picture of Isobel de Nevers.

"Do you think she's pretty?"

"Never met her," said Everhard. "Besides, she's a wicked woman and it would be wrong to think anything nice of her."

He nodded solemnly toward the amused dark eyes and went off. He played chess during the afternoon, and did not return to his chair until the first gong rang. The drowsy girl was gone.

Everhard glanced toward the chairs beyond. The old man lay there behind dark glasses, with frizzled beard sprayed along the rug's fringe. His cap was pulled tightly over his head. Grandma was gone too. There was a dull, shadowy stare behind the dark glasses as the eyes turned to watch Everhard.

"Not eating yet?" he inquired sympathetically.

Grandpa shook his head.

The fat little red faced man had persuaded his wife to have another try at the food. Everhard thought them nice little Kewpie-like folks, and explained that some people were less troubled with queaziness if they didn't eat olives. Mrs. Kewpie transferred her three jumbos to the husband's plate.

"Blank again," said Mr. Kewpie, pointing proudly at the fourth empty chair.

A steward was coming to the table,

followed by a slim, lithe young woman. Her dark hair was drawn about her head in a plain, old fashioned way, and somehow conveyed that she had common sense beyond her years. Her dark eyes were warmly moist and inscrutably steady in their mild directness. Her mouth had fine, soft lines and was not noticeably weak. The dress was a simple blue frock with some lace and a frill or two, and she wore no jewelry except a dinner ring of jade.

Mr. Kewpie and Everhard got to their feet. Everhard guessed who she was. Yes, her voice had the recognizable tone and lilt, and she was coolly at ease. She was pleasant, yet eyed Everhard as if she had never seen him before.

Conversation wasn't much. Mrs. Kewpie didn't feel so well, and it made her feel worse to see the moist dark eyes resting attentively on her husband's face when he tried to be amusing; so Mrs. Kewpie kicked him on the shins.

The Kewpie couple withdrew. The girl bent forward slightly as she raised a spoon from her ice and asked in an isn't-this-a-nice-day voice—

"Now aren't you sorry?"

"No; not yet."

"But you see, I really am old enough to play with."

"You're a sweet child. But you're wasting time. Go look for the fat boy."

Her dark eyes were level, unsmiling, yet amused. She shrugged a shoulder. There was a trace more of accent in her tone as she said—

"But perhaps I do not waste my time —no?"

She was quite sweet about it, but with a hint of purposeful intention.

She and Everhard left the table together, but he deserted her in the library and inquired about until he found the right purser's clerk.

"My name's Burnett," said Everhard.

The clerk repeated, "Mr. Burnett, sir," and tapped his lapel with backward flips of the pencil.

"How did Miss Laramie happen to be put at the table with me?"

"I am sure I don't know, sir. We must put everybody some place, sir."

He seemed hopeful that Everhard would understand.

"And everybody should be encouraged to tell the truth."

Everhard held out a folded bill.

The clerk took it, leaned forward slightly, waved his pencil shoulder high and said confidentially—

"She asked, sir."

"Good. Now I know that she really wants to be near me. I was afraid it was merely an accident."

Everhard found the deck steward and discovered that the nice Miss Laramie had asked to have her chair placed beside Mr. Burnett's.

He then went through the darkness to the upper deck, squeezing by a couple here and there in the shadows, who tried to pretend that they weren't there at all. The radio operator was alone.

"You never let any one see the messages that are handed in, do you?"

"Never, sir."

"That's right. You mustn't." Everhard laid two bills on the little table. They were big bills. Everhard pretended that he didn't know he was putting them there. "You know Miss Laramie?"

"No, sir."

"You'll meet her. Lovely girl. She'll be coming here. Something will come for her. And it would be too bad, wouldn't it, if I got drowned from jumping overboard to pick up the pieces—after she tore up her messages—wouldn't it?"

"It would that, sir."

Everhard went out. The operator did not call him back to say that he had left something.

On the promenade deck Everhard peeked through a port into the library. Miss Laramie sat close to the window with an open magazine on her lap. The page she was reading was illustrated with a man dressed like a polo player, and a girl in evening dress, on the canopied back of a bejeweled elephant.

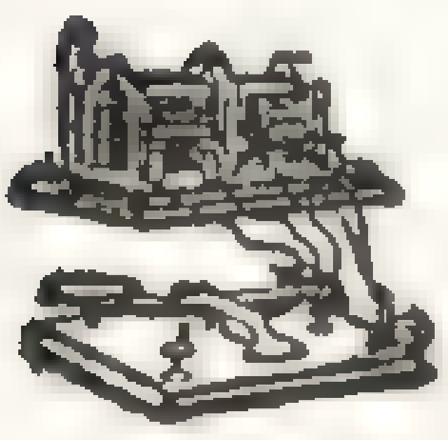
Everhard walked around the deck, paused to watch the moves of a chess game, listened to one of the purser's stories at a table in the bar, went to his room and amused himself writing a message in cipher.

> DEAR COUSIN JIMMY: HER NAME IS LARAMIE IN CASE IT HAS SLIPPED YOUR MIND, AND SHE IS FRENCH IN CASE YOU DIDN'T KNOW. AND DO I GET A MEDAL OR SOMETHING IF I DON'T GET DRUNK AND CONFIDE IN HER? SHE IS NO GOOD AND CAN'T EVEN PRETEND TO BE BAD. IT IS AN ART. I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR IDEA IS, BUT WANT TO. CALL HER OFF. SHE'S A NUISANCE.

He sent the message to the radio and went into the library.

"I have been reading such an interesting story," said Miss Laramie.

A slim forefinger tapped the page illustrated with the canopied elephant. She had not turned the page in an hour.



THE next day a radiogram, not in cipher, was handed to Everhard as he lay in the deck chair reading a novel, while the drowsy Miss Laramie wakefully watched and waited. He put the message inside the book and read:

> QUIT SEEING THINGS IN THE DARK STOP NEVER HEARD OF THE PARTY STOP IF YOU DON'T WANT YOUR MANLY CHARMS TO DO THEIR STUFF WEAR A VEIL STOP LOVE AND KISSES FROM J.

He folded the message and casually poked it into his pocket, then turned toward the girl—

"I am sure you will be pleased to hear that my wife and children are well."

She smiled, murmuring—

"I am very happy."

He read for a few minutes, took his cane and went limping off. In the lavatory he wadded the radiogram into a ball and flushed it into the ocean.

When he went back on deck he pushed his chair a little nearer to hers. She watched without moving an eyelid. He leaned against the arm rest and said:

"Now that we fully trust each other, let's tell the truth. I'm a runaway bank cashier, but if you don't report me, I'll try to be an honest man."

Miss Laramie did not smile, but said quietly:

"I saw you come on board, and you looked nice. I am very, very lonely. That's all."

"No home? Friends? Money?"

He tried not to let her see that he didn't intend to believe anything she said.

"My parents came from Paris to New York about five years ago. They are dead now. My husband drank. I have a little money. I am going back to Paris."

"Why did you say you were a Roumanian?"

"I won't tell you that—yet."

"Suppose I tell you. It's a French girl they're looking for, isn't it?"

She thought a moment, then shuddered, dropped her eyes and pressed her face against the cushion. She nodded, forcing her face deeper into the cushion.

"He was a beast, my husband." Her voice was low and muffled. "Drank and I—I must have been out of my mind!"

She cried without making any sound. He could see tears dripping down along the side of her nose. She wiped at them with a handkerchief. She raised her head a little and smiled, trustfully.

Everhard sat up, with his feet on the deck. He leaned slightly toward her.

"You have made it very hard for me. I think you must have known all along who I am, and so tried to put me in a hole by having me notice what a sweet girl you are. We had a tip you might be on this boat. I was sent along to look the passengers over. I am Detective Sergeant Burnett of Headquarters."

She poked the handkerchief quickly into her mouth and shook with laughter.

Her eyes were very bright, but still somehow inscrutable. The handkerchief came from her mouth, and she swore a Frenchman's oath, one that he had not heard since the war. Her fingers touched his hand.

"You *are* a nice man!"

Everhard said to himself, "I guessed wrong. She is damned dangerous." He put his hands to a knee and rocked back, looking at the traces of the easy tears, remembering the ease with which she slipped into any part from the kittenish flirt to the cool, elegant young woman.

She tossed back the rug and stirred, lithe and firm of body. Hers were woolen, not silken stockings. The sweater coat was woolen; the scarf at her neck too. There was a rougeless brightness about her lips. Very French, but not Frenchy. She took his hand, not coquettishly. He might have been a big brother.

"Let's walk."

Her fingers were warm.

She led him limping to the boat deck, and backed against a ventilator, her hands in her sweater pockets. He, a bit uneasily, realized that he wanted to think she was a sweet, healthy, playful girl. She was looking up with mild interest, and he watched her lips, typically French in their rapid, effortless rippling.

"I have nothing to do when you are away playing chess but doze and watch, and I believe the old man beside me is —how do you say it? Phonee? When you aren't what you seem?"

"You should know. Phony. Yes. When you aren't what you seem!" He grinned at her. "You don't seem the same sort of girl any two hours at a time. Very phony, you. What about grandpa?"

She shrugged her shoulder, amused. Her lips tightened to keep from laughing.

"As for this grandpapa, I have watched him and—"

"False whiskers?" Everhard suggested.

"No, no, no. But kinky, coarse. He is not used to it. He is always scratching so—" she rubbed at her cheeks— "with gloved fingers. He is not used to whiskers and does not like them."

"You think he is hiding something? And those glasses—maybe you're right."

"I know that I am right," she said slowly, without emphasis. "He has a little cushion. He brings it himself. He carries it away. Sometimes it makes little creaky sounds, that cushion. He is very careful with it."

"Wonder what cabin he has?"

"Three-two-three," she said at once.

"Oh." She did not notice his remark and looked at her fingernails. "How about grandma?"

"She is not nervous. The grandpapa does not go to the dining room. I think he stays where he can sit on his cushion while he eats."

"Maybe he is the runaway cashier—"

"Vilette."

"Well, Vilette, do we shake him down or tell the captain and get our pictures in the paper?"

Her glance lifted enigmatically.

"Would you?"

"What?"

"Shake him down, as you call it?" The moist eye stare had a wise look that mingled with a glow of wondering. "Would you, please?"

"Depends. I'd do anything for money —enough money. Wouldn't you?"

She hesitated.

"Of course!"

"I'll tell you, Vilette; you go back and watch. If either grandpa or grandma stirs, run ahead and bang on three-two-three. I'll be in there."

"You will do that?"

"I'll learn something about 'em. Why not? There'd be fewer crooks in the world if we honest boys and girls made 'em divvy."

"No, you will find nothing. It is in the cushion. It isn't comfortable for him to lie on. I can tell by the way he squirms and puts it beside him. He will not let grandma carry it."

Everhard left her and went downstairs, thinking:

"She can act. She sees everything. She didn't even wonder that I wondered that she knew his cabin number. Worst of all, she makes me want to like her. And that's bad."

He did not go to 323, but turned into a corridor and entered 381.

It was a tiny cabin with two berths, now occupied by only one person. He snapped the lock to keep out any stewardess, glanced about and drew a suitcase from under the lower berth. It was unlocked. He messed things up in dumping underwear and such on to the berth, and looked for a false bottom or side pocket. He went through the dressing case. Here was a small jewel box with inexpensive trinkets, rings, pins, necklaces. Not a diamond among them. He sorted them rapidly and put the most valuable, including the jade dinner ring, into his pocket. He opened drawers. He had not found a scrap of paper. Yet he was sure that little handbag she carried did not contain what he was after. He fumbled among dresses in the closet and in an inside pocket of a coat found the passport.

Mlle. Vilette Laramie, French citizen, age 22, student. She had arrived in New York on September 26th. The *Trivilia* had sailed at midnight on the 28th.

"That tells a lot," he reflected. "As for the age—it means nothing. She can be any age she likes."

He returned the passport to its pocket, opened the door an eighth of an inch, listened, stepped into the corridor and knocked on the door directly opposite. No answer. He went in. It was the same sort of cabin. Two people were occupying it; husband and wife. He hastily messed things about, but took nothing.

Miss Laramie saw him coming along the deck and stirred drowsily, turning from grandpa's side, and glanced up inquiringly. He smiled and shook his head.

LATE that afternoon Everhard took a cipher to the radio room. The same operator he had talked with was on duty, but listening to something that was not important because he at once took off the headpiece. He shook his head.

"Nothing has come. Or been sent."

"But does the other boy feel the same way about it?"

"I go over the files when I come on duty, sir."

"Good. Here's a little something to send," Everhard put down the message and a bill. "Never mind the change. Good night."

At dinner time the ship was buzzing with something new to talk about. Mr. and Mrs. Kewpie were the center of attention. Their cabin had been entered. Captain, purser and other people had visited their cabin and looked in. But nothing was missing. The sneak-thief must have been frightened off before he could pocket anything; and the kewpie-like couple were so busy telling people about it that they were not at the table when Miss Laramie came.

Everhard placed the chair for her.

"So you get the first chance at the olives tonight."

She glanced mischievously a-slant at him.

"Yes. Haven't you heard? They had a burglar. He must have taken their appetite."

With elbow on the table and forearm erect, she carefully scrutinized the polished nail of the third finger of her left hand.

"Yes, I heard. They are right across from me. They knocked on my door. I was dressing. They wanted to know if he had been in my room."

Her hand dropped and disappeared under the table. She pulled lightly at the ends of the napkin and her glance rested inattentively on the butter balls.

"And had he?"

Miss Laramie's dark, moist eyes

flashed in a lifting glance, for a moment direct and unsmiling. She smiled and put out her hand.

"How do Americans say that clever thing? Ah! Eventually, why not now?"

Everhard, the poker player, looked at her. His face was as unreadable as a closed book. It did no good. She knew the cards he held. She moved the slim fingers of the extended hand, mildly impatient, smiled, with a laughing look in her eyes, too.

Without a word, and with no change of expression, he drew the napkin through his fingers and dipped his fingers into a vest pocket. He put the half dozen rings into her palm.

"Thank you." She picked out the jade, laid it on the table, and dropped the others into her tiny beaded bag; then slipped on the green ring and held up the back of her hand, looking at it.

"I'll take it all back," said Everhard. "You *are* good!"

She smiled appreciatively.

"How could I help but guess?"

She dropped her hand and looked at him with amused friendliness.

"But there really are sneakthieves in the world. Or so I've read."

"I should have kept that passport with me. But I will learn, Monsieur Burnett. I am young, you know. But please, you tell me: How did *you* guess almost the moment you laid eyes on me?"

"You liked me too much all in a hurry. That is, if you want truth." Miss Laramie reflected, as one who studies a mistake, not meaning to repeat it. "And I wrote in my diary, 'Dangerous child, but not good enough to be bad'. However I shall admit the mistake to my diary tonight."

"You keep no diary," she said, quite as if saying, "You haven't a gray hair in your head."

He studied the words and her face.

"You've looked?"

"And didn't mess your things up as you did mine. It is wrong to steal—and worse to be so crude that you have to steal to throw one off. I am really surprised at you, Detective Sergeant Burnett of Headquarters!"

Everhard bit into an olive.

"Why did they send you?"

"They make mistakes too, I suppose."

"Who's 'they'?" he asked blandly, laying aside the pit, not watching her.

"The same as 'them'," she said even more blandly.

Their glances met and both smiled.

Mr. and Mrs. Kewpie came hurrying with a bouncing waddle, beaming and waving pudgy hands to the greeting of friends as they passed tables. They found it joyous to be the center of interest.

"Oh, so much excitement!" said Mr. Kewpie.

"Now, George, let me tell it. You never get anything straight. You see, when I went down to dress for dinner, I found—"

Mr. Kewpie reached for the olive dish. It was empty.

CHAPTER V

A PILLOW—AND WHAT IT CONTAINED

A FEW days later a message came from James in cipher.

> BRIGHT BOY STOP YOU GUESSED RIGHT STOP SHE WAS SENT ACROSS TO LOOK FOR WEAK SPOTS STOP THEY KNOW SHE FUMBLED BECAUSE I HAD TO CABLE ACROSS TO SEE IF IT WAS OK OR IF THE DEVIL WAS ALREADY SITTING IN ON OUR LITTLE GAME STOP SHE WILL CATCH HELL SO BE GOOD TO HER STOP AS FOR GRANDPA I AM ASKING THE CAPTAIN TO KEEP AN EYE ON HIM AND PASSING ON YOUR TIP BOTH TO PLYMOUTH AND CHERBOURG

Everhard also saw, thanks to the courtesy of the operator, the radiogram that came to Miss Laramie from Paris. It was in English.

SINCE YOU HAVE FAILED AVOID HIM—X,

She returned no answer, but evidently intended to obey instructions, because she did not come to breakfast or to the deck chair.

Everhard wished grandpa a cheery good morning and received a jerky grunt and a shadowy glare from behind the dark glasses. Even grandma, a stout, heavy faced woman, eyed him as if he were a most immoral man.

"Nice weather," Everhard insisted.

It was beastly weather, cold and windy.

Grandpa went to sleep and did not hear, or at least answer.

Everhard strolled around the deck, meditating, then he gave the sailor at the third class gangway a dollar to look at a whale. The sailor had to look so hard that Everhard slipped across unnoticed.

A freckle faced boy who wore a beret, and a highly blond girl with skirts swishing knee high, and impudence all over her, were at shuffleboard. They, being warm blooded, did not care about the dank, windy chill.

Everhard said:

"Well, well, Charlie! Awfully glad to see you," and put out his hand.

The freckle faced boy turned up a what-the-hell-sort of look, and glanced inquiringly at the girl.

"Dumb-head!" She slapped the boy's back. "Shake hands with Uncle Joseph." She pointed.

The boy glanced at the proffered hand, grabbed it, pumped hard and took away the bill.

"Glad to see you, Joseph! You bet!"

He was trying to get the bill into his trousers pocket, but the girl pushed against him, saying:

"Only over my dead body! Gimme!"

She slipped her hands down along his arm and pried open the fingers that were going pocketward. She looked at the bill's corner, gave Everhard a bursting smile.

"Shake hands with Uncle Joseph some more," she said impudently, giving the boy another push; and to Everhard, "So good of you to look us up. Now what's the joke? We'll laugh."

"Going? Or going back?" Everhard flipped a finger toward the beret.

"Back. To crash the Luxembourg!" The boy narrowed his eyes.

"Be a long cold Winter—in the art colony," Everhard suggested, fingering another bill.

"Anything this side of murder," said the boy.

"And me, I don't mind a little murder or two," said the girl. "I'm from Chicago." She leveled both forefingers and waggled her thumbs. "Tommy gun stuff is my line. All boobs fall for me, don't they, Speckles?"

"Cut it out," said the freckled boy. "Uncle Joseph wants to tell us something."

"We're bored over there," said Everhard. "Nothing happens. A little vaudeville—sort of impromptu. How about it?"

"A twin to this—" she shook her blond hair backward into the wind and slapped her silken leg—"and I'll do anything. You tell it. We'll do it!"

She held out her hand . . .

Later in the day Everhard and Miss Laramie sat with their chairs so close together that each held half of the same magazine. They looked at pictures. The magazine dropped as a woman's frightened scream rang out.

There was the sound of running feet; more screams. The blond girl from Chicago came with hair flying and short skirt jerked above her silken knees. She ran for her life, or seemed to. Two jumps behind, a freckled man with beret a-slant ran with hand outstretched, cursing. Drowsy idlers in the deck chairs sat upright as if pinpricked, then surged into an open mouthed huddle as the man caught the girl's flying hair, and struck her. She turned, suddenly resolute. It was a cat fight. They put on a show that brought even bridge players from the saloon, cards in hand.

A great clamor rose from passengers. Men in double-breasted blue coats with braid on their caps pushed, struggling to get through the huddle about the fight. The passengers themselves didn't feel like interfering; the blond girl was getting the best of it. People stood up on their steamer chairs the better to see.

The fighting girl and the freckled boy, suddenly silent, were hustled off toward the captain's quarters. The fight was over. Grandpa's cushion was gone, and so was Everhard—with a slight bulge under his loose topcoat.

In his stateroom Everhard fingered the cushion and grew reassured. The strangely observant Miss Laramie had been right. It was lumpy and a bit creaky. Grandpa no doubt had meant to go through customs wearing it under his shirt as a full stomach, scarcely noticeable under the folds of an overcoat.

Everhard locked the door, put his stick aside, took off cap and coat and spread overlapping newspapers on the floor. He put the cushion in the center of the spread papers and ripped with a penknife. His fingers groped sensitively inside the padding of silk floss. He drew out a sheaf of fresh bills, riffled their ends, and said to himself quietly—

"Mother of Moses—whoever she was!"

He pulled at other sheaves, dusting the floss off carefully over the newspapers, and grinning.

"Poor old grandpa. His lifetime stealings all gone!"

TO BE CONTINUED

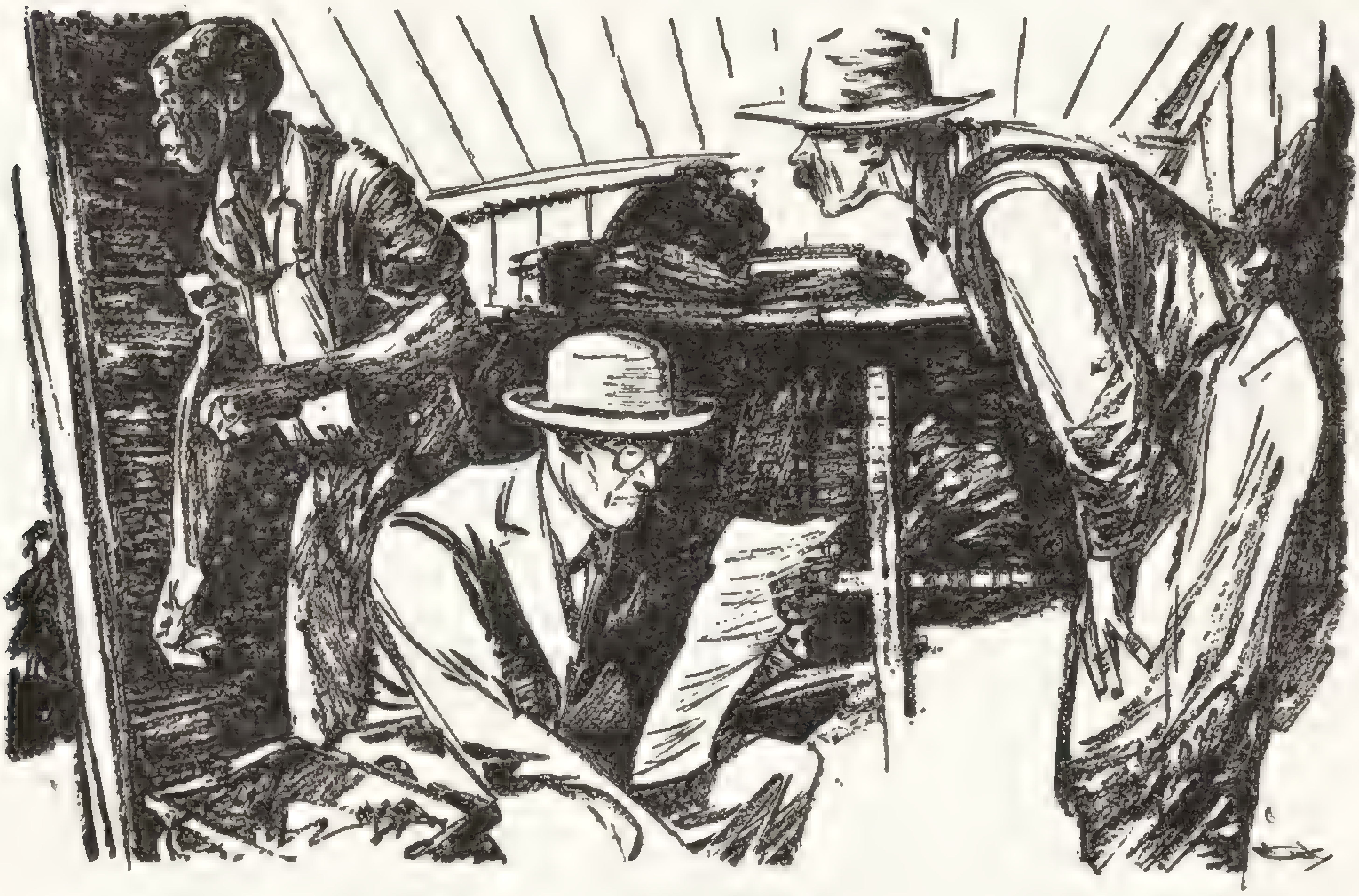
WAITING FOR A FREIGHT

By Harry Kemp

FOR the long train of boxcars to bump down the way
We'd waited and waited, that hot Summer's day:
Hobo and gaycat and work-free bum . . .
"Won't that freight ever come? Won't that freight ever come?"
Soon we got tired of waiting, and scattered to hit
The houses and stores of the town for a bit
To eat; and, in bags and in newspapers wrapped,
Brought back what we'd begged, that an old ex-cook slapped
In a battered tin boiler.
                    And bo, gaycat, bum,
We all sat around while we ate up the slum.
"She's having a hard time at making the grade—
Here she comes!" A far whistle announced the parade
Of the long, jostling freight with the engine in front
That stopped by the tank, with a wheeze and a grunt!

We picked out an empty and climbed up inside—
All new and just made for us hoboes to ride!
Each one of us took the soft side of a board
To rest on, as happy and free as a lord!
Too tired for a job and too lazy for crime,
We got what we looked for—a good, easy time!

By the Author of "The Web of the Sun"



The RESURRECTION OF CHIN LEE

By T. S. STRIBLING

GALLOWAY, superintendent of the Everglades Mill & Manufacturing Company, and Professor Henry Poggioli, his weekend guest, were discussing at the breakfast table in the superintendent's bungalow the rather didactic subject of recognition. The mill official did not expect, it did not even occur to him, that an immediate personal relevance could arise from so detached a theme. He was simply saying that he himself never could tell negro babies or Cubans or Chinamen apart.

Poggioli, the psychologist, was about to make some reply when a tall, raw boned white man came up the conk lined walk and halted just outside the screened breakfast room.

"Jim," he called to the mill official, "them last potatoes I got from Tampa ain't fitten to feed hawgs on, much less mill han's. What am I goin' to do about it?"

"Write to Farburger & Company and tell them about it."

"Yeh, and they'll think I'm tryin' to flim-flam 'em and next time they'll want cash with their order."

"Just when did the Everglades Mill

Company lose its reputation for honesty?"

"These ain't mill potatoes. They're mine. I bought 'em for the ships."

"Oh, I see. Well, that's different."

"So I figgered I'd send one hamper back by Chin Lee when he goes up to buy supplies today, just to show 'em what rotten stuff they tried to put off on me. The freight won't be nothin'. Chin Lee can take one hamper along with him as personal baggage."

"M-m . . . Well, all right, do that. Good plan to show folks you're on the level when you happen to be—helps out at other times when you don't happen to be."

The superintendent opened his teeth but kept his lips closed with the expression of a man inwardly laughing at his own jest.

The man outside the screen wall was not amused.

"Then I'll tell Chin Lee to take a hamper with him."

He turned back down the garden path under the red flaming boughs of some poincianas.

The superintendent bestirred himself to make amends for a possible discourtesy.

"Wait a minute, Erb. I want to introduce you to Professor Poggioli. Professor Poggioli is one of the greatest criminal psychologists in America. He was attending a convention in Miami and I got him to come visit us over here in Everglades. Now I want you to spread yourself in the kitchen while he's here. Mr. Poggioli, this is Erb Skaggs, our cook."

The sun tanned man peered at the guest through the wire.

"You say he's a criminal psychologist?"

"That's right."

"What's he done?"

Both gentlemen laughed. Galloway said—

"What he does is to find out what other folks do."

"Oh—you mean he's a detective?"

"In a way. He bears the same relation to an ordinary detective that the president of the Everglades Company bears to one of our lumberjacks."

"Gosh, he's a high priced man," said the cook soberly. "Who's he after down here?"

"Nobody at all. Just down for the weekend to eat and fish."

The rough faced man pulled down his lips in a grimace meant to be humorous.

"Hope he uses jedgment in what he fishes after."

And with that he turned and walked back toward the mill kitchen.

"Good old Skaggs," remarked the superintendent half affectionately. "Always in hot water about a little ship chandlery business that he runs on the side, and he brings me his troubles."

Conversation paused for a moment and then the psychologist said:

"By the way, what were we talking about a moment ago? I had a question to ask."

"You mean just before Skaggs came in?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, lemme see—what *were* we talking about?"

For a moment or two the breakfasters sat trying to think back, but they came to nothing.

"I recall what I wanted to ask you," said Poggioli. "I wanted to know if you were especially fond of chop suey?"

"Am I fond of chop suey?" Galloway smiled at the oddity of this question.

"Yes," Poggioli said, "but I can't remember why I wanted to ask it."

"That's funny. Why, no, I don't believe I ever tasted chop suey. I wonder why you wanted to ask that?"

POGGIOLI shook his head with the air of a man giving up a problem, then ejaculated: "Certainly I remember! What you said about not being able to tell negro babies, Cubans and Chinese apart. I understand how you came to use Cubans and negro babies, but I wondered where you had met enough Chinese to choose them for examples?"

"Why, Chin Lee, our kitchen boy."

"Just Chin Lee? Don't you know other Chinese besides Chin Lee?"

"No, none at all," said the superintendent, rather amused at the psychologist's problem.

Poggioli puckered his brows.

"Why, that makes it more extraordinary than ever!"

"I don't see why."

"Because you seriously say you can't tell one Chinese from another, and here you never have known but just one Chinaman. You were serious, weren't you—you were not trying to be funny?"

Galloway broke out laughing.

"No, I wasn't trying to be funny. I meant what I said."

"Well, that's absolutely amazing. Have you any idea how you arrived at the generalization that all Chinese look alike when you have known only one?"

The superintendent became humorously thoughtful.

"Now, lemme see: Chin Lee—Chin Lee— What could there be about Chin Lee?" He pondered for some moments and finally nodded. "Yes, it must be that."

"Be what?"

"This may strike you as funny. I suppose it will. I never had thought of it myself before. The truth is I never have really known Chin Lee. I see him only now and then, and I don't remember how he looks from one time to the next. Of course I recognize his Chinese generalizations. I know he has a yellow face, slant eyes and wears his shirt outside his trousers; but the actual man himself—honestly, I can't recall his features at this moment."

Poggioli was astonished.

"How long have you known him?"

"He's worked here two or three years."

"That really is odd. I suppose it is a race obsession. You are so obsessed with Chin Lee's Chineseness, if I may coin a term, that your recognition stops there and doesn't reach the individual. It is probably based on our Anglo-Saxon superiority complex."

The superintendent laughed.

"I didn't know I felt that way until you asked me about it."

"Oh, well, a man is so accustomed to his own biases and slants that he never knows he has them."

Professor Poggioli sat considering the further queer fact that Galloway had decided all Chinese looked alike because the one Chinaman he did know never did quite resemble himself. A droller *non sequitur* he had never encountered.

He was smiling faintly when he saw a negro man hurrying up the garden walk. The black man's expression caught the scientist's attention. His dark face was drawn and of a grayish cast. The whites of his eyes circled his black irises. He came to a halt some distance down the path and called in an unsteady tone—

"M-Mist' Jim, kin I see you a m-minute?"

"Now, Sam, why do you want to come bothering me when I've got company?"

The negro made a desperate gesture.

"Mist' Jim, I jes' got to see you a minute."

The mill man gave a hopeless shrug and explained to Poggioli—

"Sam's the night watchman; somebody's probably been stealing lumber while he was asleep and now he's all cut up about it."

He opened the screen door, went as far down as the third poinciana, put a hand against its bole and asked in a bored tone—

"Well, what is it?"

The negro's answer was in a voice too low for the psychologist to catch, but he nodded toward the mill and the docks with a terrified expression. Presently Galloway ejaculated:

"What! Chin Lee?"

Sam explained something more.

"How did it happen? Is he still there?"

Here the black man went into a long rigmarole, pointing at Poggioli on the porch. Galloway shook his head.

“No, no, I wouldn’t bother Professor Poggioli with a little thing like this. Besides, he didn’t come down here to work; he came down to rest up and fish.”

THIS reference to himself induced the psychologist to call out—

“What is it he wants with me, Mr. Galloway?”

“Oh, he says he’s heard about you,” deprecated the superintendent, with an apologetic laugh.

“Is he uneasy because I am a criminologist?” inquired Poggioli, amused.

“Oh, no, Sam’s all right. It’s not about himself. He’s begging me to have you take a look at Chin Lee.”

“What’s happened to Chin Lee?” inquired the psychologist with more interest.

“Why, he’s lying over there on the lumber dock, Sam says, with a bullet hole in his head.”

Poggioli arose quickly and came out into the garden.

“When did you find him, Sam?”

“J-jes’ a li’l while ago.”

“You were night watchman, I understand. You yourself didn’t have any trouble with Chin Lee—catch him stealing lumber or anything like that?”

“Lawdy, no, suh; no!” cried the black man in a panic. “Theah you is, Mis’ Jim, jes’ whut I was tellin’ you! He think ’cause I’se night watchman, I mus’ ’a’ shot Chin Lee. Why, I di’n’ even know he was shot tull I walk up on him.”

“You must have heard the shooting.”

“N-no, suh—take mo’n a pistol to wake me up when I’se night watchin’.”

The criminologist paused a moment, and then said—

“Let’s walk over, Mr. Galloway, and see what we can find out.”

The superintendent cleared his throat.

“Well—I suppose we ought to go and take a look around, Professor.”

Poggioli was a little surprised at his host’s attitude.

“You would naturally go, wouldn’t you?”

“Oh, certainly, I’d have to go!”

“Well, you—don’t mind my going with you?”

“Why, no-o—” Galloway cleared his throat again. “But if you don’t object, Professor, may I say here that I hope your interest in this matter will be—uh—purely academic?”

Poggioli looked at his companion in amazement.

“Academic!”

“Y-yes—if you don’t mind.”

“What am I to understand by academic?”

Galloway blinked.

“Well if you should find out who the murderer is, I—I hope you won’t feel it necessary to—to make a great to-do about it.”

“You mean not tell it—keep it quiet?”

“Well, baldly, I’d rather you would—keep it quiet.”

Poggioli stood looking at his host for several moments.

“That is the most unusual request I have ever had made of me.”

The superintendent moistened his lips.

“I suppose it is. But I have a good reason. These killings happen every now and then around the mill here. If the newspapers get wind of this one, they’ll feature it because you’re on the case. Then they’ll get busy and dig up all the other killings and feature them, too. That will go all over the United States, and it will be damn rotten publicity for Everglades. It will prejudice investors against the place. So I do hope you’ll keep quiet anything you find out. It’s business with me.”

The scientist listened in surprise to this odd reasoning.

“I had never thought of murder as adverse advertising.”

“Well, if you had promoted as many boom towns as I have,” said Galloway earnestly, "you'd know enough to hush up any little killing like this. Now if it were a big killing—like a banker or a preacher or a millonaire sportsman—I'd say go to it. A big murder trial would draw a lot of people to Everglades, and we'd sell 'em homes or business sites or something of the kind; but a dinky little killing like this—" Galloway shook his head. "It would do more harm than good."

Poggioli smiled dryly.

"Well, that's a Florida viewpoint. Come on, let's walk over for our private curiosities."

Here a discussion came up as to whether the three men should walk or ride to the lumber dock. The superintendent wanted to ride, because Everglades was laid out on the gigantic scale of a Florida boom town, and the houses in it which were actually built were so far apart that a neighborly call between any two residences was impossible without the aid of a motor car or a passing bus. The superintendent was about to send Sam for his automobile, but Poggioli said the walk would do them good, so the three set forth afoot.

AFTER a long hike they reached the dock full of racks of lumber with the planks standing on end in order to season in the hot sun without warping. As they entered the vast lumber yard, Sam walked more and more slowly. Finally he stopped altogether and said the dead man was right around the next rack. It was clear that Sam did not mean to walk around the rack himself.

"When did you find him?" asked Poggioli.

"'Bout a hour ago, suh."

"Did you move or touch the body?"

"No, I can tell you he didn't," interposed Galloway, walking on around the rack.

"Sam, do you know of anybody around here who had a grudge against Chin Lee?"

Just then he heard Galloway, from the other side, call out in annoyance—

"Sam, where in the hell is the thing?"

"Why, right theah befo' yo' eyes, Mist' Jim, layin' wid his face down an' a hole in his haid."

"Well, I don't see him."

"'Fo' Gawd, I ain't gwi' have to come aroun' an' point out a daid Chinaman undah yo' nose, is I?"

"If I'm going to do anything about him, Sam, I've got to see him. I don't see what the hell you wanted to walk off and leave him like this for, anyway."

"Wh—whut you speck me to do wid him?"

"Well, there was the edge of the dock, wasn't it? Just what do you imagine the duties of a night watchman are?"

Poggioli came around the rack.

"Is it gone?"

Galloway drew a long breath of relief, got out and lighted a cigaret.

"It certainly is gone, and thank heaven that ends our problem. Got a match?"

Poggioli supplied a cigar lighter.

"I don't see how that ends the problem; it strikes me that it makes it more complicated."

"Oh, no—you don't know what problem I was talking about."

"Well, just what were you talking about?"

"Why, how to avoid an inquest and keep the mill from being held up half a day. You know every man jack in our plant would have to be questioned. Why, it would cost the company ten or twelve hundred dollars—just for a dead chink." Galloway stood looking up and down the dock. "I imagine the man who killed him came back and rolled him in the water."

Poggioli looked more carefully at the planking.

"I suppose he was lying here on this stained place?"

"Yes, suh, yes suh." The negro nodded.

"Then he hasn't been rolled off the dock," said the psychologist.

"Why do you say that?" inquired Galloway antagonistically.

"Because there are no stains on the boards or trail in the dirt where he was dragged."

The mill official glanced about in his turn.

"There are no stains or trail in any other direction, either."

Poggioli stood pulling at his chin, looking up and down the dock's edge. After several moments he replied absently to Galloway:

"Yes, yes, so I had observed . . . How big a man was Chin Lee—about what did he weigh?"

Both white man and negro began pondering this odd question.

"I figgahs 'bout a hun'erd an' fifty or sixty," hazarded Sam. "But I don' see whut diff'unce dat makes now, seein' as he's daid."

The professor continued musing over the situation.

"Did Chin Lee go with any women here in Everglades?" he inquired.

Here Galloway caught the drift.

"Oh, no, Chin Lee hasn't been seen with a woman since he came here . . . Would you say he had, Sam?"

"No, suh," corroborated Sam.

"Not being seen with a woman is not identical with never being with one," pointed out the psychologist. "Could you give me a list of the women here in Everglades, either white or colored, who are large and strong enough to lift a hundred and sixty pound man clear of the dock and carry him away without so much as a heel dragging?"

"Whut you gwi' do wid any sich list as dat?" asked Sam, thrusting out his head and dropping his mouth half an inch.

"I thought we might take such a list and just walk around among the more powerful women here in Everglades, and tell them that Chin Lee had been shot. We could watch how they take it."

"Just why do you think it was a woman who killed him in the first place?" inquired the mill official.

"Because whoever killed Chin Lee did it for a sentimental reason."

"How do you get that?"

"Because she didn't throw the body over the dock to the sharks. I can easily understand how in the excitement of homicide, any person, man or woman, could run away and forget to dispose of his or her victim; but here is the revelatory circumstance: This murderer escapes, but returns, not simply to destroy the evidence of her crime, but to pick it up and take it away with her.

"She could not endure the thought of her lover's body being thrown to the sharks or given over to any stranger who found it, or to the callousness of a coroner's jury. She even bound up the wound her own pistol shot had made. On this point I am undecided.

"Did she tie a piece of cloth around his head out of a useless tenderness, or was it merely to keep from leaving a trail of drops to betray her direction. Of course, that has nothing to do with finding the person, but it is an interesting point in criminal psychology."

Both men were amazed at such detailed deductions from the mere fact that the body had been removed without leaving a trail. Still both remained equally sure that Chin Lee had never gone with a woman in Everglades.

Poggioli spread his hands.

"If what you say be true, this becomes one of the most puzzling murders in my experience. If he were not spirited away from this dock for a sentimental reason, I am forced to doubt that Chin Lee was ever killed at all."

"Why couldn't he have been killed by crap shooters, or cock fighters?" demanded Galloway impatiently. "He gambled heavily on both sports."

"Because such a murderer would have tossed him over the dock automatically. It would be the most natural reaction in the world. You even reprimanded Sam for not doing it himself, and getting rid of the whole unpleasantness at a stroke."

"M-m, yes, that is a fact, I did," admitted the superintendent. "But, of course, I didn't exactly mean it."

"So my thoughts keep coming back to a woman," concluded the psychologist. "Now while you and Sam think up that list, suppose we go to the dining hall and look through Chin Lee's things. We might find a letter or a woman's picture—something to throw light on who shot him."

The scientist's theory had a logical solidity which the superintendent was unable to shake, so he contented himself with saying rather emptily that he didn't believe it was a woman, and the three set out back for the kitchen.

The January sun was higher now and beat down with a sticky heat. Galloway complained again that he had not brought his car. Once, as the men trudged through the sunshine, Poggioli said—

"If there were any bloodhounds near here, this would be settled in an hour or so."

"No, no," repeated Galloway. "The sheriff and his dogs would be too much publicity—sorry."

THE grub shack of the Everglades Mill & Manufacturing Company was a great wooden structure whose walls were made up mainly of screened windows and doors. The only solid things about the place were a big electrical refrigerator run by current from the mill's dynamo, and the kitchen stove, which was an old ship's range that the New York manager of the company had bought at a marine auction in Brooklyn.

In the kitchen the two white men found Erb Skaggs directing two negro helpers in picking chickens. They had twenty or thirty fryers piled in a tub for the noon meal. A tin pan held the livers and gizzards.

"I was just wonderin'," said Erb, meeting his visitors, "if Mr. Poggioli likes livers. Thought I'd fry him a chicken and stuff it full of livers."

Galloway nodded.

"There you are, Professor. When Erb decides to do you proud he does you proud . . . By the way, Erb, where does Chin Lee bunk around here?"

The cook changed his expression completely.

"Where does Chin Lee bunk?"

"Yes, I'm checking up on the men to see how they are billeted. I've got to send in a report."

The cook frowned and stood looking at the superintendent.

"Is that why Mr. Poggioli come down here?"

Galloway laughed shortly.

"No, it doesn't require the help of a psychologist to describe what a lot of mill hands' bunks look like."

"Well, my bunk's in that little screened off space yonder in the corner of the kitchen. And you can tell the comp'ny when too many other things git in it with me, I take to a hammock that I got strung up outside."

"Yes, I know where yours is. Now where is Chin Lee's?"

"Mr. Galloway," cried the cook, "I be doggone if it ain't a shame for you to have to poke around lookin' at the dirty stinkin' bunks of these mill hands. Say so, an' I'll do it for you."

"No, just show me—"

"I'll go with you—I'll take you to it."

"We can get there all right if you'll just point it out."

The cook jiggled about, moved a skillet on the range, but finally complied.

"Well, Chin Lee bunks right yonder in that little shack yonder—" He followed them irresistibly for a few steps. "You didn't want to see anything about Chin Lee hisse'f, did you—whether he had any complaints to make or not?"

"I don't imagine he has any complaints to make," said Galloway.

Skaggs dropped behind.

"Well, n-o, I reckon not . . . That little shack, right there."

The shack in question was a trifle more than a large goods box. It had in it three shelves. The bottom shelf was spread with a dirty mill blanket, the middle one contained two bags.

"Now you want to look into those for a picture or a letter or something?" questioned Galloway.

"If you please."

"Sam, swing 'em down."

The black man lifted one gingerly to the dirty floor.

It was an ordinary pigskin bag, rather worn from travel. When the valise was open, a variety of odds and ends lay spread before them: Chinese shirts and trousers, a set of eight ivory chopsticks, a Chinese print in a silk folder, a carved opium pipe and some tiny porcelain teacups, without handles, nested together.

The psychologist squatted on his haunches in the chairless shack, turning through the collection. Presently he opened a small ivory box filled with tiny gold trinkets. He held it up to the superintendent.

"Know what these are, Mr. Galloway?"

The mill official picked one up.

"Look like gold gyves for a game rooster to me, but they are too blunt."

The psychologist squatted, looking at them with a puzzled expression.

"They're too much for me."

"Don't you know what they are?"

"Oh, yes, they're fingernail guards. They protect the fingernails so they'll grow long."

"What's the idea in that?"

"Why, it's a Chinese mark of high caste—it proves the owner doesn't do any manual labor."

"Then what are you puzzled about?"

"Why a kitchen helper here in Everglades should own a set of gold nail protectors. What would a coolie want with nail guards?"

Galloway considered this proposition.

"Chin Lee might have brought them over as curios."

The psychologist shook his head slowly.

"If an American had brought them to this country, yes; a Chinaman, no. They are no more of a curio to a Chinese than a cigar clipper would be to you."

Galloway agreed to this.

"Then I would say at some time or other Chin Lee had been a man of leisure."

"Then what's he doing here in your kitchen, surrendering his caste?"

"Oh," cried Galloway, "that's nothing. What a man is in Florida is no sign at all of what he was where he came from. One of the biggest racetrack men in Miami was once an eminent Episcopal minister in Connecticut. And then, on the other hand, I know a Chicago gangster who is trying to reform our school system. He makes speeches about it and says the children of Florida ought to have the same chance to make good men and women as the children of Chicago."

"Well, at any rate," pondered Poggioli, "these nail guards give Chin Lee a background where one is likely to run across any sort of motive. Why was he in hiding? Was this a murder of revenge? If so, why should the man save the body? Was it the riddance of an heir to some large Chinese estate? In that instance the murderer might want to produce the body somewhere to prove his victim is dead."

"Oh, you're giving up the woman theory?"

"No, not at all; but if he has been a very wealthy man, it introduces other possibilities. Look here; I would really like to find the body. Suppose we have over the sheriff and his hounds?" The psychologist glanced at his host interrogatively.

Galloway was tempted.

"TELL you what I'll do," he offered. "If you'll guarantee to me that Chin Lee was a millionaire and that somebody murdered him while he was at work in the company's kitchen, by George, I'll not only agree to the bloodhounds, but I'll telephone for the brightest newspaper reporters in Miami to fly over here and help you on the case. I'll do that if he's rich."

"Not if he has *been* rich?"

"No; he's got to be rich right now. There's no news value in the murder of a man who has been rich—at least not in Florida after the boom."

"But look at it this way," said Poggioli. "Suppose I showed you a spot on the ground bearing traces of petroleum; wouldn't you be willing to sink a well there, even if I couldn't absolutely guarantee that you would strike a gusher?"

The superintendent of the mill company shook his head.

"Not now. Five years ago, Mr. Poggioli, I'd have backed you to the limit if I had caught a whiff of oil, but since the boom I wouldn't put a nickel into a speculation of any kind unless it was guaranteed by the United States Treasury and insured by Lloyds."

The scientist shrugged.

"Well, all right. It's just that sort of psychology that is keeping this depression functioning, Galloway; but you fellows refuse to see it. I do wish I could find the body and examine it. It would be more revealing than these bags."

"I see that," agreed the superintendent, "and I'm really sorry I am not in a position to do anything about it."

This apology of the superintendent for not being able to assist in capturing the murderer of any cook's helper with a rating of less than AA1 in Bradstreet, was interrupted by a shadow falling over the group.

The negro Sam glanced about, gave a sort of grunt as if some one had struck him violently in the stomach, and abruptly scrambled up into the top bunk.

Galloway moved back from the valise and gave an odd kind of laugh.

"Well, I'll be damned—Chin Lee!" he exclaimed. "We thought you were dead. This damn fool, Sam, here—" He nodded angrily at the pop eyed black man in the upper bunk.

"Me no dead," said Chin Lee. "Me fall, get hurt, wake up by me by, come back klitchen."

Galloway was outraged.

"Sam, you black ignoramus, you're a thunder of a night watchman! Run off and leave a wounded man lying on the dock!"

"He was daid!" cried Sam. "Yo' sho' was daid, Chin Lee, wid a great big hole in yo' haid!"

"Me pull out big fish," explained the cook's helper simply. "Foot slip, fall, hit head, by me by wake up again."

The head of the cook's boy was tied up with a great bandage.

"Well, Chin Lee," said Galloway, "sorry we mussed up your things."

"Allee lite," rattled the Chinese. "Me dead, somebody mus' open bag."

"That's true. Well, we're glad you're no deader than you are."

Chin Lee lifted a hand to his bandage.

"Big bump—feel allee lite now."

The negro climbed down from his bunk and the visitors were about to go.

"Why did you come here, Chin Lee?" inquired Poggioli. "Skaggs send you down?"

"You say you look at my bunk. Me come say bunk good bunk."

"You heard us talking as we came through the kitchen?"

"Yes."

"What were you doing at that time?"

"Fix potato. Mis' Skaggs say fix potato go Tampa."

"I see. When do you go?"

"On 'leven."

The psychologist glanced at his watch.

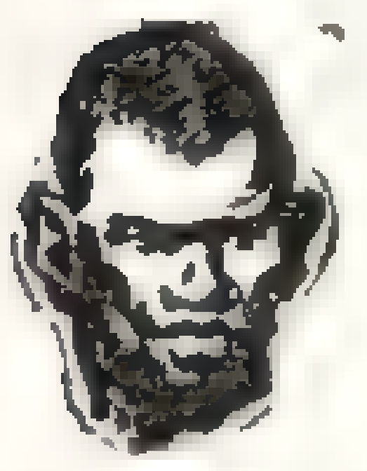
"That isn't far off. We'd better go back and let you finish."

The four men moved out of the shack for the kitchen. In the big screened shed, the two negro helpers were now pouring bread dough in an electric kneading machine.

"How do you fix the potatoes to go back to Tampa?" Poggioli inquired of the Chinese.

"Fill up hamper, put him in ice box till go," explained Chin Lee.

He led the way to the potato bin and resumed the simple business of filling a split basket with potatoes. The criminologist watched the work for a few moments, and a little later the white men set off for the superintendent's bungalow.



ON the way back Galloway fell to bemeaning Sam for cowardice—too cowardly to walk up to a man on the dock and see whether he was dead or not.

"He sho was daid then, Mist' Jim; he ain't now, but he was then."

"Oh, you're not only a coward, you're an imbecile!"

"Don't be too hard on Sam," soothed the criminologist. "It seems to me there are some very odd things about Chin Lee's resuscitation."

"What's that?" inquired the superintendent sharply.

"Well, for instance—where did he get his head bound up?"

"In the kitchen, I suppose. Why?"

"Then why didn't he leave a trail of drops from the dock to the kitchen?"

"His head probably had stopped bleeding by that time."

"But if it were an arterial cut, wouldn't it have broken out again when he got up?"

"Well—it didn't do it."

"Apparently not," agreed the psychologist.

The two men entered the superintendent's garden and passed under the blue-green leaves and yellow melons of a papaya shrub.

"It's odd," went on the scientist, "after such a wound, he goes right back to work sorting out samples of spoiled potatoes and, apparently, he is going to Tampa on the eleven o'clock just as he had planned."

"I don't suppose he was hurt as badly as Sam thought."

"That's possible, too," admitted the psychologist. He walked on a space and then said, "There are two things about the way Chin Lee sorted out those potatoes that seemed very odd to me!"

"And just what were they?" inquired the superintendent, beginning to feel faintly ironic about his guest's finical logic.

"One thing was, his hands were perfectly steady."

"You mean if he had just been knocked out, he should have been shaky?"

"I think so; don't you?"

"Well, I don't know. He may have extraordinary recuperative powers."

"All right, I agree to that temporarily. Now how do you explain this final contradiction? Chin Lee picked up his sample potatoes and put them in the hamper in a very ordinary manner—in fact, just as you or I or Sam would have done it."

Galloway looked at his guest and then broke out laughing.

"Really, Professor, is that a matter for suspicion—filling a hamper with potatoes in an ordinary manner?"

"Certainly!" said the scientist tartly. "If a man has spent years and much care in growing long and delicate fingernails, don't you know he would have formed motor habits to protect those nails? He would have picked up the potatoes with fingers and thumbs held straight, and not bent at the knuckles in the usual manner."

The superintendent was a little bewildered at this.

"Look here, where is all this getting us, Mr. Poggioli?"

"Well, all these slight contradictions mean very little taken by themselves; but put together they amount to a great deal. However, I think they might be construed logically enough, if Sam's first diagnosis had been correct."

"Sam's first—what was Sam's first diagnosis?"

"That Chin Lee was dead."

Black Sam began to nod.

"Boss, now yo're shoutin'—you sho is shoutin'."

Galloway smiled incredulously.

"Look here, what sort of a fellow are you anyway? When Sam came and told you Chin Lee was dead, you looked around the dock and decided if Chin Lee wasn't killed by a big strong woman, then he wasn't dead at all. Well, that was a good guess. You were right —Chin Lee turns up alive. But now, by George, you look at Chin Lee alive, sitting there picking up potatoes, and decide he must be dead. You are the hardest man to get to agree with anybody I ever saw. You won't even agree with yourself."

The psychologist disregarded this complaint, but after a moment asked gravely—

"Why is it so necessary to send a hamper of spoiled potatoes back to Tampa today?"

"It isn't necessary at all so far as the potatoes are concerned, but Chin Lee has to go anyway, so Erb might as well send the potatoes along."

"What does he have to go after?"

"For supplies for the *Mayaguez*. She is expected in tonight, and Skaggs must deliver her a lot of green groceries and such-like stuff. As I told you, he's a ship's chandler in a small way."

The psychologist nodded with a sharpening of attention.

"When was the last Cuban boat in?" he inquired quickly.

"Why, I think the *Ponce* pulled out of here last night. Why?"

"Nothing, nothing; I was just curious . . . By the by, Mr. Galloway, I'm afraid I'm going to have to start home on the eleven o'clock train, if you don't mind my cutting my visit short a trifle."

The superintendent began the usual protest, then followed Poggioli up to his room and stood talking while his guest packed his personal belongings.

A FEW minutes later the two men got into the superintendent's car and set off.

When they came in sight of the station, Poggioli saw a solitary figure on the platform standing beside a large basket. Galloway saw him too.

"Yonder's Chin Lee with his potatoes —very faithful fellow."

A minute or two later they drove up to the station and entered the waiting room. At the office window, instead of purchasing transportation, Poggioli signaled the agent to him and asked *sotto voce*—

"That Chinaman on the platform—did he pay for his ticket in American gold?"

The agent looked at the criminologist and said that he had.

The investigator thanked him and turned to the outer platform. As the two men walked out, Galloway asked curiously—

"Why did you put such a question as that, Mr. Poggioli?"

"I wanted to see if your kitchen boy was just over from Cuba."

"Is he?"

"Yes."

"How does his paying for a ticket in gold show that?"

"Because a great deal of American gold is used in Cuba, while here in Everglades you pay off your men in bills."

"But Chin Lee hasn't been to Cuba. He must have had some gold of his own."

"Yes, but he wouldn't have spent it if he had had anything else. People don't spend gold when they can avoid it. No, he's just over from Cuba. He arrived on the *Ponce* last night and now he's on his way to New York."

Galloway stared at his companion, bewildered.

"Look here, what do you mean? Isn't that my Chin Lee standing there?"

"That is your present Chin Lee. You'll have another tonight when the *Ponce* comes in; but the Chin Lee you are thinking about is dead."

"Poggioli," said the superintendent in a shocked tone, "you're crazy!"

The criminologist said nothing more; the two men walked out on the platform and joined the kitchen boy. Poggioli placed a hand on the rim of the hamper.

"Boy," he asked in a casual tone, "why did you shoot Chin Lee?"

The yellow man looked at his questioner with an expressionless face.

"Me Chin Lee."

Poggioli nodded.

"I know you are now; you are one of a long line of Chin Lees, but why did you shoot the Chin Lee we had here yesterday? Why didn't you let him go on to New York, or Chicago, in his turn?"

The man with the bandaged head said blankly:

"No savvy. Me Chin Lee."

The scientist began throwing the decayed potatoes carelessly across the track. They were still cold from the ice.

"If you don't savvy now, you will in a minute or two." He began scooping out handfuls of the tubers. The Chinaman watched the performance for a few moments, then said casually—

"Me savvy."

"I thought you would. Now, why did you kill Chin Lee?"

"Him likee this," said the kitchen boy impassively. "Some Chinaman velly bad man—big general—fight Chinese government—velly bad—get run out of country. Try to come back, deserve die . . ." The Chinaman hesitated.

"That's all good and well," agreed the psychologist, "but why didn't you shove him off the dock when you had the chance? Why are you lugging him around in that hamper of spoiled potatoes?"

The Chinese lifted a brow as if he had no hope of making his questioner understand.

"After allee, Chin Lee Chinaman. Send him back to own country to sleep. No let him come to his fathers from land of barbarian."

The psychologist nodded.

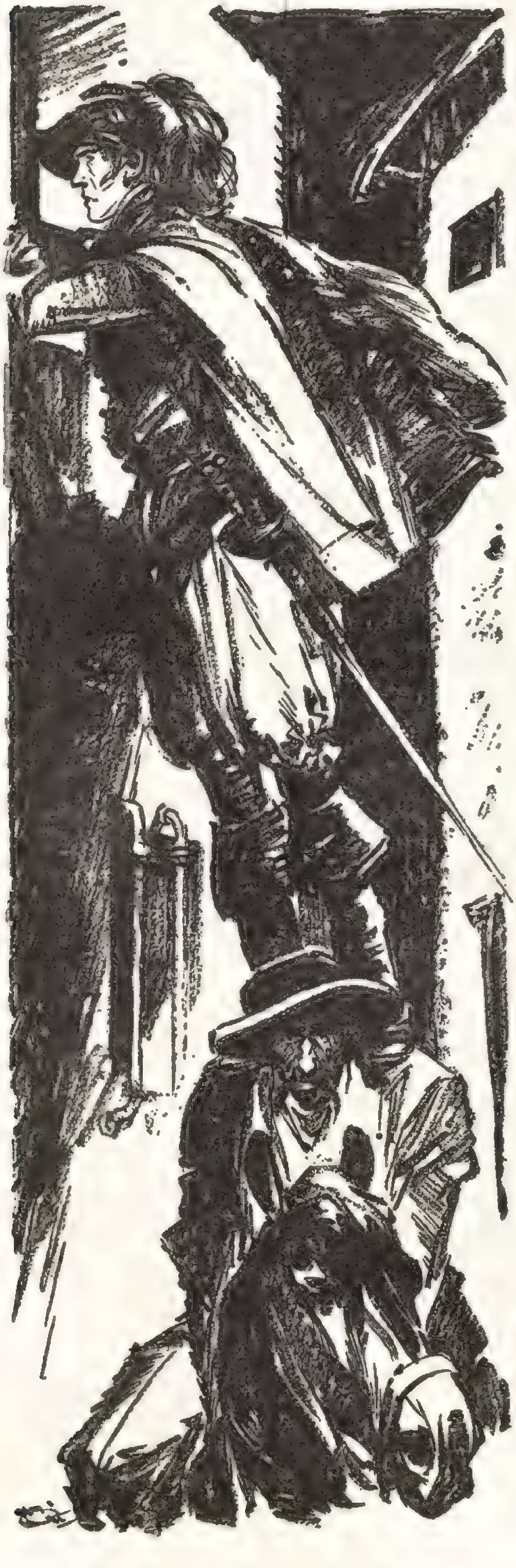
"Simple enough. Odd, I didn't think of that myself."

Galloway interposed:

"What in the thunder is all this about! Chin Lee dead, and in that hamper?"

"Skaggs is smuggling Chinese into this country from Cuba, and one of them happened to be after the man just before him. That's all there is to it. And by the way, it also explains why you were never able to recognize one of your collective kitchen boys when you saw a sample of him before your eyes."

By the Author of "Porto Bello Gold"



The GOLDEN COCKEREL

By

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

SUNSHINE splashed warmly across the flat roofs of Cadiz. In the bay the armadas swayed rhythmically to the pulse of the swell that rolled in from the infinite mysteries of the Western Ocean. Don Rodrigo was conscious of a sudden sense of awe, which he curbed instantly as he perceived the admiring glances of a group of fisher girls carrying their laden baskets up from the beach. His right hand rose instinctively to twist the scanty yellow hairs of his mustache, and a touch of the spurs set his barb to prancing daintily.

The girls smiled and waved acknowledgment. He permitted himself a stately inclination of the head. To think that but last week he had been put to the indignity of counting sheep the herders drove into the pens!

He set his velvet cap at a more rakish angle, made certain the hilt of his sword was thrust forward on his hip and clinked the coins in the pouch his father had handed him:

"A hundred castellanos, my son, and it will be two years before we work off the mortgage I have given Israel of

Badajoz. Look to it you make them last. There may be gold in the Indies, but it is hard enough to come by in Castile."

A pox on the aged! Why must they be forever prating of hardship and economy? He liked to think of his answer:

"Señor, you shall have the whole of it, with Israel's interest, by the first eastward armada."

His father had laughed, but the look in his mother's face had heartened him. He blinked a tear from his eye—this dust was a plague of Satan the accursed!

On his right hand a handsome *casa* lined the street, long blank walls broken only by a single massive gateway, palms and dwarf shrubs nodding over the low parapet. His roving glance caught the flutter of a mantilla among the branches, and he doffed his cap with a sweeping gesture of gallant intent.

"Madonna! Be merciful, and spare a smile for a poor gentleman who must seek his fortune in the Indies."

A crimson bodice flamed in the greenery, and black eyes twinkled down at him.

"A lad like you can have all the fortune he seeks wherever he rides." She laughed. "What is your name, *caballero?*"

"Rodrigo de Morla."

"And where is your home?"

"Truxillo of Old Castile."

"A gray land," she deplored. "You do well to leave it." A shadow quenched the vivacity of her expression. "Spain is for the old, the Indies for youth." Hoofs beat in the *casa's* depths, and she pointed a warning finger toward the gateway below. "The Intendant is coming. Ride on, Don Rodrigo. But—" and the shadow lifted—"after dark, a *caballero* who is so bold—"

The soft ripple of her laughter, with its undercurrent of mockery, was more seductive than words, yet he sensed, too, a subtle hint of cruelty which left him oddly disturbed.

"Ah, madonna, you are kind to one unworthy." Mouthing the empty phrases, he bowed to the crupper, wondering why an assignation so promising should find him faltering in ardor. "I kiss your hands and feet. If it be God's will, then!"

Across the street a Gypsy beggar was plucking at a guitar and crooning softly one of the melancholy songs of the Gitanos:

> "Come, little dove, you'll take no harm;
> Feel, little dove, the nest is warm—"

From the gateway emerged a cavalcade of *alguazils* in somber black cloaks, headed by a bent, scrawny, old man, who huddled down in his saddle as though he were overburdened by the fantastic profusion of jewels which sprinkled his doublet and gleamed through the links of the golden fanfarona looped about his bony neck. Don Rodrigo curveted to the Gypsy's side as the cavalcade turned townward.

"Whom have we here?" he asked, tossing a coin which nimble fingers picked expertly out of the air.

"A thief's blessing, most noble *hidalgo,*" exclaimed the Gypsy, and a sly grimace twisted his mobile lips. "Who but the illustrious Señor Don Pedro Zamora, Intendant and Deputy General of the Council of the Indies?"

Don Rodrigo peered up at the barrier of greenery rimming the *casa's* parapet, and tugged complacently at what he was pleased to call his beard.

"Not so bad! Not so bad!" he murmured to himself. And to the Gypsy, "Why does he ride abroad with so numerous a company?"

The Gypsy shrugged his shoulders.

"There is trouble in the town, Excellency. The armada's people grow restless."

"Why?"

"Men say the Intendant will not deliver the sailing license because the Admiral Gonzalvez refuses to give him a share in the venture. But how should I know the truth, who am but a poor dog of a Gitano?"

Don Rodrigo smiled.

"At the least," he said, "you know at what tavern in the meantime a person of quality might indulge himself."

"But certainly, *caballero!* At Portado's, in the Street of the Purification, you will find the gentry of the armada making sport of the delay."

Don Rodrigo nodded his thanks, and set the barb to a trot, humming to himself the air the Gypsy had crooned and jingling the coins in the pouch which was slung by straps from his swordbelt. By the Five Wounds, this was better than the University at Salamanca! Give him one good main, and he'd double his capital.

PORTADO'S was a huge, gray block of buildings on a corner opposite the embarcadero. Its stableyard was crammed with squealing horses and screaming varlets, and from its seething interior came a riot of noises—clattering of dishes, shrill outcries of cookmaids, rattling of dice cups, bellowing of curses, clanking of armor. Don Rodrigo edged his way through the confusion until he spied a fellow with empty hands.

"You, there," he summoned, "bait my horse, and put him in a safe place."

"I can not, young sir," protested the man. "I am to see aboard the *Admiral* the horses of the illustrious Don Matteo Alacan."

Don Rodrigo reached over and caught him dexterously by the ear.

"Can not? What talk is this? You have ample time to ship Señor Alacan's horses, if what I hear be true." He released his hold, and slipped a small silver piece from his pouch. "Do as I bid you, and there'll be another of these for your pocket. Fail me, and I'll cut off your nose."

The fellow grinned uncertainly, but he caught the barb's bridle when Don Rodrigo dismounted.

"Saving your grace, noble señor," he said, "speak a word for me to Don Matteo, if he is in ire. I make no doubt he will listen to so valiant a gentleman."

"That he will," assented Don Rodrigo, and swaggered off to the tavern door.

But at the threshold he paused with a grin on his face that was as uncertain for the moment as the stable varlet's. He had never witnessed such a spectacle. In the center of the immense room a troupe of tumblers were performing on the floor rushes; in one corner a Barbary ape was sawing at a fiddle the while its master tootled a pipe; two men were fighting with sword and dagger in another corner to the plaudits of a throng pressing dangerously close to their whanging blades; and in and out between the tables and the bystanders roamed the waiters and drawers, voices droning monotonously:

"By your leave, most noble señors. If it please you, Excellencies!"

On every hand cards were flicking at play, and dice rolled on tabletops or the stones of the empty hearth. Don Rodrigo experienced a surge of ecstatic satisfaction. Yes, yes, this was better than Saragossa! He wiped the grin from his face, mustered an air of indifference and sauntered toward the table which showed the richest cloaks and armor. Its occupants were dicing, and he noticed at once that they were quieter than any other group, although the curious, standing around them, were vociferous over the trend of luck.

"He has thrown it again!"

"Look, look! Ambsace!"

Don Rodrigo eased an elbow between two shoddy habits, thrust forward his swordhilt and gained a vacant seat, blandly heedless of the black glances of those he had displaced.

There was a lull in the play as stakes were paid, and several of his neighbors regarded him humorously.

"Are you for teasing fortune, young señor?" inquired an enormously fat man opposite, who wore a cloak of French velvet, embroidered in gold, over a cuirass of Milanese steel.

Don Rodrigo's heart thumped a beat faster than usual, but he answered steadily, bowing to the fat man—

"With the company's permission, Excellency."

A cadaverous man in rust specked mail, sitting at Don Rodrigo's left, spoke after an interval of silence.

"I have no wish to offend you, señor, but my age entitles me to say that this is high play for a fledgling."

"Yes, yes," muttered several.

"The admiral speaks wisely," assented the fat cavalier.

Don Rodrigo opened his belt pouch and drew out his purse.

"I have not nursed these eighteen years, señors," he rejoined, "and it is my money, not my age, which should interest you."

The fat cavalier laughed approval and stabbed a thick arm across the table.

"So I would have my own son speak," he exclaimed. "I am Matteo Alacan, lad, and I'll take your coin, or lose you mine, as the dice fall."

Don Rodrigo gravely accepted his hand.

"We are well met, Don Matteo. There was a fellow in the stableyard asked me to soothe your ire because I bade him bait my horse before he set yours aboard ship."

Don Matteo doubled in his seat.

"So you would!" He appealed to the admiral. "Do you hear him, Señor Gonzalvez? By my hope of Purgatory, the lad has parts!"

"If not insolence." The admiral frowned. "Who are you, señor?"

Don Rodrigo named himself.

"Are you an *hidalgo?* An Old Christian? Can you prove that for four generations no Moorish or Jewish blood has come down to you?"

Don Rodrigo uncovered his yellow head.

"My color speaks for me," he answered. "I am of the blood of kings, señor. My ancestor was Rodrigo, last of the Visigoths. Can you say as much?"

Again the fat cavalier's laughter resounded, and there were a few servile echoes to his mirth; but the admiral replied with stately precision:

"Señor, for your ancestry you have ancestors to thank. For yourself, you must look to the mercy of God and such talents as have been vouchsafed you. And no man, whatever his blood, goes far, who has not learned respect for his elders. I, señor, might be your father—and I am an admiral of the Ocean Sea."

Don Rodrigo rose to his feet, with a sweep of his scabbard clearing the loungers at his back, and bowed, cap in hand.

"Señor, I am honored by your notice," he said. "And the more because it is my purpose to take ship with your Excellency, if you will permit."

A saturnine smile lighted up the admiral's grim features.

"You have the makings of a right Castilian, young sir." He passed the dice box. "Let us see if luck is as lenient as—shall we say I am?"

"And the stakes?" queried Don Rodrigo.

"Do you name them."

"Five castellanos?"

There were protests from the board, but the admiral waved them aside and the fat cavalier slapped a heap of coins in front of himself.

"Let him have his way. A golden cockerel, this lad."

Don Rodrigo threw a deuce and a trey and jauntily pushed his stake to the table's center.

"A stoup of Alicante," he directed a drawer. "And inquire these gentlemen's wants."

THE main went to Don Matteo, who fixed the new stakes at the same figure after a pause to drink the young cavalier's health. And the glow which pumped through Don Rodrigo's veins was not due solely to the heady wine. He tossed the dice, when it came his turn, with the carelessness he had so well assumed before.

All rival diversions had ceased in tribute to the high play he had started—even the duelists had retired to dress their wounds. The clicking of the dice was punctuated by the exclamations of the onlookers:

"A Mary's name! There's sixty castellanos."

"The Galician has won twice running."

"There, the young *caballero* has lost again!"

"Ah, señors, he'll not last long at this rate. I know a farm in El Andalus I could have had for his losings."

The afternoon waned into twilight, and servants stuck flaming torches into the iron brackets on the walls. Occasionally a player withdrew, laughing or grumbling, according to his nature; but always some one stepped forward eagerly to occupy the abandoned seat, to hail the drawers to fill up the leathern jacks, to mumble a patter of prayers over the poised dice cup and lunge forward to follow the ivory cubes in their devil's dance among the wine lees. The gold so freely risked exerted an inexorable lure, which none escaped—neither the admiral nor Alacan nor Don Rodrigo, who was increasingly aware of a feverish tickle in his throat requiring a constant stream of Alicante to stay its irritation. Yet it was the admiral who spoke a word of caution in the youngster's ear—

"Your pardon, señor, but we have played overlong." And the fat cavalier, who called bluffly across the table:

"What? Do I win again? This is become tiresome, señors. Let us sup."

All looked to Don Rodrigo, who smiled as he fingered the last five castellanos in his purse.

"Let us sup, señors," he agreed. "But let us play, too. Shall we count our gold, who will have the Indies to loot two months hence?"

The admiral coughed dryly.

"In the Indies, as elsewhere, the gold that is to be had must be toiled for," he observed. "Also, it is by no means certain that this accursed Intendant will issue us a sailing license in two months or two years—and by my hope of salvation, I'll not yield to his rapacity, though the council treat me as they did the great admiral himself!"

The snapping of the torchwood could be heard in the room's sudden stillness. And as suddenly the fumes of the Alicante, which seethed in Don Rodrigo's brain, exploded in a flash of intelligence which seemed as loud to him as the blast of a culverin.

"'Who hunts the wolf must ride to the mountain,'" he quoted casually. "I have an idea for handling that rascal, Excellency."

"Indeed?" The admiral's tone was as dry as his cough. "We shall be grateful to you, señor . . . Don Matteo, it is for you to set the stakes."

The fat cavalier broke off in the midst of the fat chuckle with which he had greeted the youngster's boast. But before he could speak Don Rodrigo slowly stacked five castellanos, one upon another.

"Oh, as usual," he said. And sat back, comically aghast, when he threw fives. "Without so much as a saint's name," he protested.

But a Calabrian shipmaster matched him, and so did a burly Knight of Calatrava, and the admiral, who passed the dice cup to Don Rodrigo with a faint air of distaste. Only the youngster held himself aloof from the tension, briefly signing the cross above the poised cup. Then the dice rattled on the table and rolled to rest in front of Alacan.

"A five and a six," he cried.

Don Rodrigo raked in fifty castellanos, a tinkling heap that shimmered brightly in the mellow light; but sweeter than winning to his pride were the murmurs at his back—

"I'll lay you a Genoese ducat his luck has changed!"

"He has the touch, this lad!"

Nor was he discouraged by losing twice in succession. On the third cast he was successful again, and after that, no matter how his fortune varied, the pile of coins in front of him mounted higher and higher. He had doubled his original purse, drunk deep and eaten well, when a hoarse command rasped through the room—

"In the king's name!"

And one of the black cloaked *alguazils* he had encountered in front of the Intendant's house strode to the table, with a covert insolence of manner which drew scowls from the *hidalgos* and brought a flush to the admiral's weathered cheeks as the fellow louted his hat, almost as though he rendered a favor in the act.

"Illustrious señor," croaked the *alguazil*, "the *alcalde major* requests you to wait upon him to receive sundry complaints laid against the people of your armada for damage and insults inflicted upon the citizens and for unlawfully occupying the streets and the embarcadero to the grievous loss of the merchants—"

The admiral towered out of his seat, and one glare from his eyes silenced the glib tongue.

"Faugh!" he growled. "I might have known these catch-pennies had still another trick to play. What do they care for the advancement of the king's power overseas? For them the Indies are a golden cow to be milked to satisfy their stupid greed. Peter's curse on them!" He flung his cloak over his shoulder. "Get you aboard, señors, while I buy free the poor sailors who have been flung in the *calabozo* because they had no more money to spend."

And he strode forth into the night, the *alguazil* cowering after him. A torrent of oaths burst from the table, and Alacan laughed ruefully.

"An end to our play, señors." There was a general scuffling of stools, and he addressed Don Rodrigo direct, "You'll come with us, my golden cockerel?"

But the youngster shook his head. The idea born of the wine fumes—and of the memory of the shapely wench half seen behind the shrubbery of the Intendant's parapet—had taken more definite shape. By the mass, he'd show these new friends they hadn't accepted him for nothing!

"Later," he replied evasively. "For the present, señor, there is a matter which detains me."

Now, Don Matteo, like every one else at the table, had long since forgotten his casual boast to the admiral—didn't all saucy youngsters in their cups talk large? The fat cavalier dropped an understanding wink.

"So she is fair, lad! Ah, to be young!"

And Don Matteo heaved a gusty sigh, which dissolved into a wheeze of mirth and produced a string of salty admonitions to pursue Don Rodrigo to the door, where he paused to smile confidently over his shoulder and catch the hem of his cloak with his sword's sheath as the admiral had done. A snap of his fingers in the tavern yard, and the varlet who had taken his horse came running.

"Here you are, noble señor! I have fed and watered him and rubbed him down with sweet, fresh hay. A charger in ten thousand, Illustrious! But the steed of the Cid would not be too good for so fortunate a gentleman. What, señor? A whole castellano? May the Blessed Savior have you in His keeping, who are a boon to the poor and a protection to the oppressed! May the Evangelists send you a ripe measure of happiness, and the eyes of every lady—"

CANTERING out the tavern gate, Don Rodrigo was as happy as the day he'd first ridden in the lists. If only Francisco and Melchor and Alonzo and the rest of the village boys could see him! Or Fra Jeronimo! Or his mother—he wiped the back of his hand across his eyes. What a filthy town was this Cadiz! After all, no one would dwell in Spain who could reach the Indies. But then not many could climb as swiftly as he, cup mate of an admiral of the Ocean Sea, of *hidalgos* like Don Matteo. Why, he'd won more in a few hours' gaming than his father's rents fetched in two long, laborious years!

The Intendant's house was a white blur in the darkness. Deep within the gateway a lantern burned dimly, and from the unseen patio came the melody of splashing water. Don Rodrigo surveyed the blank walls with an abrupt collapse of confidence, and his hand went to his hilt as a shadow detached itself from a tree trunk. "You are late, señor. The Intendant has returned . . ."

It was the Gypsy, and his assurance suggested to Don Rodrigo that he was not unused to such incidents.

"It is the Intendant I seek," retorted the youngster, trying for the admiral's gruff incisiveness.

"The gate is open, Excellency."

Was there a hint of derision in the silky voice? Well, let it pass.

"And is there—no other way?" challenged Don Rodrigo.

"There is always another way—for those who dare," replied the Gypsy.

His hand stole out to caress the barb's muzzle. The horse whickered appreciation.

"See how profitable it is to know a thief," murmured the silky voice. "For us, *caballero,* there are no gates and doors. Here, beside the wall, if it please you. Now, suffer me to mount behind you."

The barb started at the double weight put upon his back, but quieted instantly in response to a soothing word. The Gypsy placed his hands on Don Rodrigo's shoulders and cautiously stood erect, then braced himself against the wall.

"So! I am a ladder for you, señor. No, never fear for the horse. Put one foot on my hip—take hold of my hair—the other foot on my shoulder—up with you!"

Scarcely realizing how he had achieved it, Don Rodrigo found himself on the Gypsy's shoulders, his upstretched fingers clutching the edge of the parapet. A heave, and he had flung one leg across and was a-straddle of it, peering down at his accomplice. He had a vague impression of eyes that glittered wickedly, and crossed himself—the fellow was no Christian! A sorcerer, perhaps. You heard terrible tales of the Gitanos. Hastily, he fumbled in his pouch and thrust a gold piece into a hand which silently demanded recompense.

"Wait for me," he ordered, hoping again he had acquired the admiral's tone.

"Ah, señor, are we not brothers of the same craft?" The silky voice reproached him. "A fair division is all we thieves ask."

Don Rodrigo hesitated. A murrain on the scoundrel! But he had gone too far to turn back. He slipped through the hedge of greenery, and found himself on the flat expanse of the *casa's* roof. His first move was to draw his sword, his second to seek the stairs which led to the building's interior.

They were a black pit of emptiness, which he probed a step at a time until he came to the heavy door at their foot. Here there was a faint streak of light, and he listened carefully before he raised the latch and flung it open, ready to meet a rush of armed men, if he must; but the only inmate of the spacious room beyond was the woman of the parapet, who sprang lithely from a pillow strewn couch surrounded by tall altar candles, their flames like lance points burning stiffly in the breathless air. She eyed him curiously, one hand tugging at the folds of the gown which clothed her in a sheath of emerald samite, and there was no trace of fear in the exclamation with which she recognized him.

"Don Rodrigo!" And in the Gypsy's words, "You are late, señor."

With the same lithe grace, she sprang to a door in the opposite wall and would have barred it, but he waved her back.

"The Intendant—where is he?"

"That old pig? Never think of him!"

"But I must see him."

For an instant she was startled. Then her eyes shifted from the hardy alertness of his bearing to the naked blade in his hand, and a light so evil flared in her face that he shuddered. She clawed at the latch; the door banged against the wall.

"You come from the admiral," she exclaimed. "I know! Never deny it. But be swift, señor. There are *alguazils* in the house. He is afraid of such as you." She darted to him and seized his reluctant wrist. "That second door to the left. Do not knock—be swift, I say."

HE WRENCHED free from her and strode out into the hall, where shadows leaped under the guttering wall torches. His boot heels rang loudly on the flagging, yet to himself the beating of his heart was louder, and there was another din of culverins in his ears—a stout wine, that Alicante! When he came to the Intendant's door a scornful zest led him to stamp in as though the admiral's company were at his heels, but the old man sitting at the table by the glowing brazier was too immersed in counting money into canvas sacks to raise his head or yield more attention than a fretful:

"Quiet, fellow! . . . Eighty-one, eighty-two, eighty-three— Oh, malediction, this ducat is false!"

"Ah, señor, I am distressed to interrupt you," apologized Don Rodrigo.

"What? What?" The Intendant crouched over the table like a vulture guarding its carrion.

"Who are you? What do you want here? Who—who—"

"I am come for the sailing license, Excellency—the license for the armada of the Indies," Don Rodrigo explained pleasantly.

"From Gonzalvez, eh?" There was a note of relief, even of triumph, in the quavering tones. "He's getting anxious, isn't he? Heh, heh, heh!" And then his beady eyes perceived the blade in Don Rodrigo's hand. "That sword! Put it up! Put it up, I say! How—how dare you, insolent? I haven't the license. The alcalde—" he hesitated.

But the youngster marked his anxious fingers reaching for the ribboned scroll next the money bags, and seized it first, the old man's angry screech sufficient proof of its identity.

"Ho, Pepe, Juan! To me! I am robbed!"

His sword rasped from its sheath as he scrambled to his feet, and a door crashed open to admit a pair of *alguazils*, their long cloaks fluttering furiously.

"Kill the rascal. No, no, take him alive! He shall go on the rack—I'll have him plucked limb from limb!"

The Intendant leaped forward, the *alguazils* with him, their three blades ringing Don Rodrigo in a half circle of steel; but the youngster thrust the scroll into his doublet, caught up a stool in his left hand and beat them off, laughing excitedly with the pure joy of combat—if only there were some one worthwhile to watch and applaud him!

He parried a thrust, felt a blade rip through his trunks, heard a clang on the floor at his feet. Close, that! He hurled the stool into one *alguazil's* face, dodged the other and ran the Intendant through the shoulder, the old man's yelp of pain shrill in his ears as he raced for the hall. In the doorway he had a lightning glimpse of the woman in green samite glowering balefully at his victim, and instinctively he knew what the *alguazils* clumping after him would find when they returned.

Pursuers panting at his heels, he traversed the room where the altar candles flickered in the draft, took the roof stairs three at a bound, crossed the roof without a check and jumped blindly from the parapet. One ankle doubled under him, but he was up immediately, peering right and left for the Gypsy and his horse. Both were gone!

Above him he heard the *alguazils* clamoring for aid, and inside the house bedlam was let loose. Dios, what a fool he'd been to trust the Gypsy! He must flee afoot, and he made off at a limping run for the embarcadero, thankful the townsfolk were all abed and the streets deserted.

But the strand was deserted, too, and precious minutes passed—and hoofbeats sounded in the cobbled streets—before he found a fisherman preparing to shove off for an early start.

"Quick," he hailed the man. "A castellano to put me aboard the *Admiral Gonzalvez!*"

The false dawn was whitening the sky above the town when they bumped alongside the admiral's caravel, and a grizzled Biscayan shipmaster scowled down at them from the waist.

"You're not of our company, señor. We're full here."

"No matter," retorted Don Rodrigo, swarming awkwardly up the side. "Call the admiral."

"After the night he had? I'd as soon call the king's self."

"I have his sailing license."

"Oh, that's a different matter, young sir."

Don Rodrigo remembered the fisherman waiting alongside, fumbled absent mindedly for his pouch. It was gone as completely as his horse! Only the severed straps which had linked it to his belt were left. He was so dazed by the discovery that the shipmaster must draw his attention to the admiral, looking down upon him from the rail of the poop.

"What is this that I hear, señor? If you are in liquor—"

"Why, I've lost my purse, Excellency," gaped the youngster. "And the Gypsy stole my horse."

"And so you parade a tavern boast for excuse to board my ship!" The admiral's voice was bleak with displeasure. "I had thought you a man of better mettle, sir."

The unharnessed bulk of Alacan loomed beside the admiral's taut figure.

"The golden cockerel!" he exclaimed. "What's your trouble, lad?"

Don Rodrigo was very tired, and more than a little dismayed, and the fumes of the Alicante had evaporated from his brain.

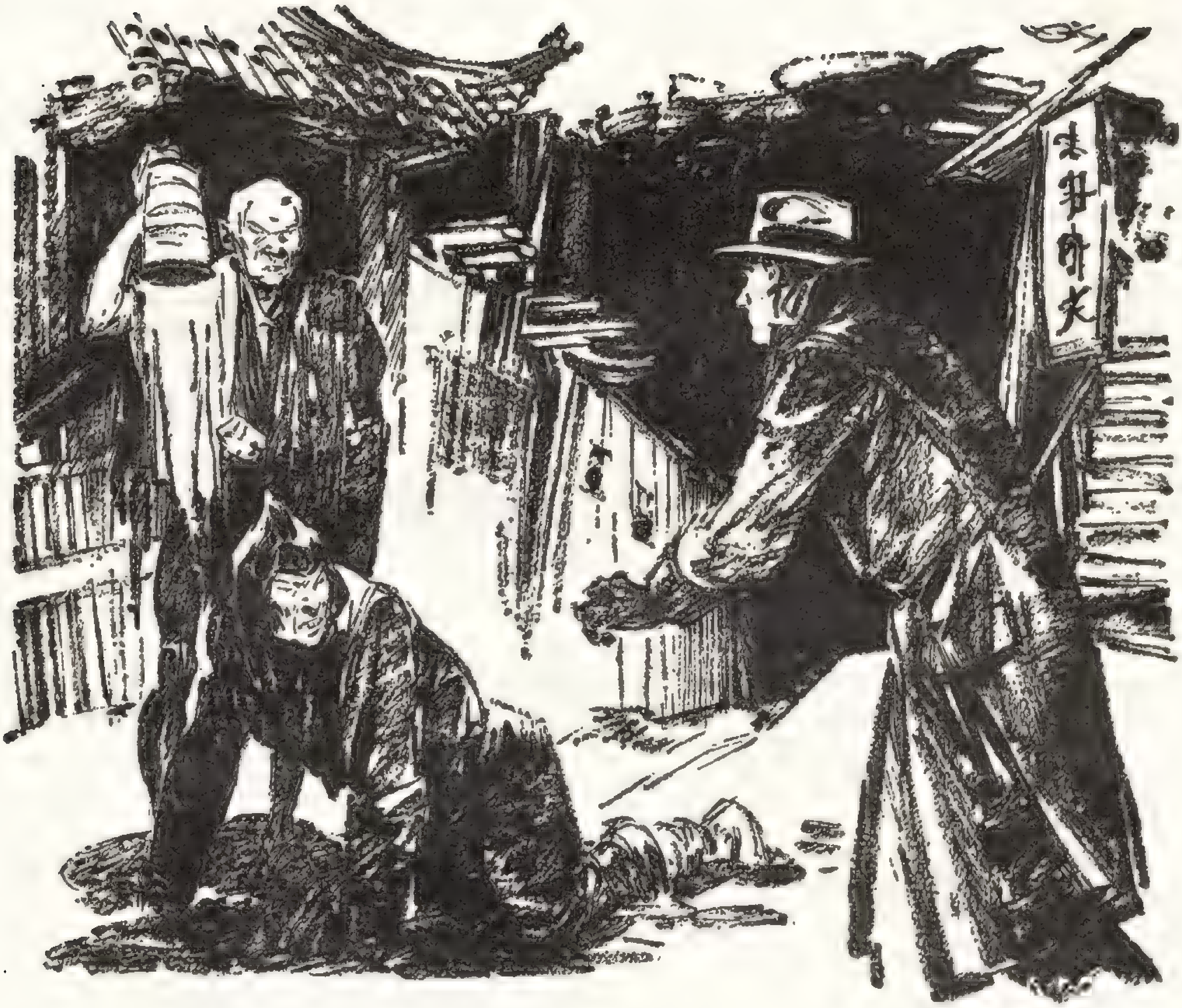
"I have lost my horse and my money, señor," he replied dolefully. "And I misdoubt I have been the means of the Intendant's death."

"Of the Intendant's death?" shouted the admiral.

"Yes, Excellency, I ran him through the shoulder—and there was a woman." Don Rodrigo gulped, feeling uneasy at his stomach. "I took the sailing license—"

He produced the scroll from his doublet, and the admiral slid down the poop ladder like a schoolboy to snatch it.

"By my Patron, it is so! He has done it, Don Matteo." And to Don Rodrigo, "Oh, never think of your passage money, young sir! My purse is yours. That fisherman? He shall have two castellanos. Ho, shipmaster, fire a gun and make our sailing signal—and send us a flagon of wine to the poop. Come, lad, we'll drink to a lucky voyage!"



The RIVER *of the* SKY

By SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL

ANDREW MOFFAT was striding along the Street of the Slender Bamboo when the bells began to ring. In the pauses between the mighty strokes of the great bell in Funkagawo temple he heard the sharp, sweet shuddering on Toranomon and the golden moan at Ushegomé. The moon god's priests were summoning worshipers. Offerings of rice straw shaped into sickles, of polished steel mirrors, should be made to the purple clad god of night.

It was late; it was very cold. The tiled roof of the Toranomon tower cut an ebony wedge into the thick Winter stars. A single vender of *udon*, crouching over his charcoal fire and iron pot, raised his voice monotonously, *"Na—aaa—beya—ki—uuudon!"* and kept up his appeal until he recognized the white man for what he was. Then he fell to waving a round fan at the coals. Here was no customer. Foreigners did not appreciate the strength given by the boiling hot, macaroni-like paste in the pot. Not even this *danna-san,* who had lived years in the district.

The long, square, paper lantern flickering beside the vender did little save disclose the hard blackness all about.

Moffat suddenly quickened his steps. The *udon* seller, managing a shrewd glance while he fanned his fire, decided that the white man was undoubtedly disturbed about something; disturbed and possibly angry. The white man had failed to greet him, although it was well known that the *danna-san* understood what constituted politeness.

Moffat's lean young face, with its tight lips, justified the vender's opinion. He had started out earlier in the evening on what seemed a simple matter. Already it had throbbed itself into an affair which was undeniably complicated and which would prove of the sort that made walking along dark streets very senseless.

Summed up, George Yakahira, merchant and Eurasian, had decided that competition with Moffat's company, the Asiatic-Import, was no longer necessary for the halfcaste's happiness. In vain Moffat had pointed out the many favors granted Yakahira by the A-I; uselessly, the American had attempted to show the other that there was silk enough, priceless herbs enough, lacquer and porcelain in sufficient quantity for two men to buy. Yakahira, sipping his tea, had been unmoved.

The halfcaste had finally delivered an ultimatum. He said politely that North Japan was notoriously unhealthy during the Winter season.

"And so I would suggest," said Yakahira suavely, "a long—and permanent—trip for you, Moffat."

Which was where the situation stood. Moffat, without the slightest hesitation, but matching the Eurasian's hissing Japanese, had told Yakahira to go to the devil; to which the powerfully built halfcaste had responded by saying that he intended to live as long as he could.

That was a threat. Moffat knew, from Yakahira's past performances, that it might be carried into execution.

As the white man strode along, wary of dark corners, he saw the first paper lantern dance in the near distance, and his ears caught the tinkling of small bells, always coming closer. Three times Moffat had seen *kammairi,* those seminaked worshipers, going to the temples in the midst of the cold season, but in the other three years he had nothing like this to anger him. Where would it all end?

The first *hadakamairi* ran toward him, lantern swinging yellowly except where the owner's name was painted upon the oiled paper. The worshiper was dressed only in a short white jacket; his bare feet made no sound as they touched the icy street. In a few moments other Japanese were hurrying toward the temples. Women, naked save handkerchiefs about foreheads, with unbound hair hanging low. Men in white wadded cotton jackets and bare thighs. Sturdy villagers with white strips of silk of their own making over their shoulders. Men entirely nude. The lanterns bobbed and made the brown bodies glisten. In the dark night these worshipers appeared as a troop of ghosts. The only sound was the constant tinkling of the small bells carried to keep away night demons.

Moffat knew these *kammairi,* although none spoke to him as he walked toward his house. Their first words could be spoken only after they had bowed before the moon god and sipped the initial cup of sweet *amazake.* These words would be addressed to the deity, imploring his favor. The naked Japanese were from all classes, but were all young. The old could never withstand the bitter, icy night.

Along the street Andrew Moffat saw a final lantern coming toward him. It advanced slowly, if steadily, and the white man began to watch it as he walked. The worshipers were supposed to run to the temples. Only haste pleased the gods. Then Moffat decided that it was utterly ridiculous to suspect Yakahira of attempting anything so soon. The Eurasian would probably wait to see if his half veiled, ominous threat were obeyed before acting.

Moffat was rather glad that the time for a showdown had arrived. He didn't like Yakahira. He didn't like the way the man did business. The way he did other things. Short weight. Matters involving daughters of the Japanese in his debt. If Yakahira wanted trouble, Moffat, recognizing the odds against him in a foreign country, was willing to give it to him, although he had no idea just what might be done. He certainly would not wait for the halfcaste to begin.

The lantern was much closer now, a bare hundred feet away. In its dull gleam Moffat was able to glimpse the carrier, and guessed he was a very old man.

Although the glitter of the lantern held his eye, something made him turn his head; he saw a dark figure leap from behind a clump of bamboo which gave the street its name. Moffat swerved, hesitating only until he saw a thick arm swing viciously up. Then, with the knife blade already over his head, he stepped forward and smashed the would-be assassin squarely under the stabbing arm.

The deflected point of the knife stung against Moffat's back just below the shoulder. Almost like one blow, the white man's other fist swung in an uppercut; it should have crashed against the jutting, hairless chin, but, like the first blow, seemed to slide off without doing damage. The naked body of the Japanese was heavily coated with some pungent grease, proof that he had been informed as to how white men fought—with nothing save their hands.

Moffat's two blows did drive the assailant back, where he was equally dangerous. Now, cautious, he might circle his prey and slowly hack the other down. No idea of outdistancing the chunkier man entered Moffat's head. The matter had to be settled right here, or, shown to be a coward, the A-I man's usefulness in the district would be ended.

There was a smile on Moffat's lips, but none in his eyes. The attack meant Yakahira.

The lantern bearer was close behind the chunky Japanese now. Moffat was unable to avoid the brightness of the paper lantern, although he tried to keep his gaze fastened on his enemy's face. The lantern was carried slowly forward, almost painfully forward, by a Japanese in snowy white kimono.

Moffat thought he caught a tensing of the naked man's body, presaging attack; this would come in a circling, Oriental fashion. A dash in, a slash bringing blood, a swift retreat under cover of the blade's point. Moffat's position was not good. He could expect nothing from the second Japanese, who might even be one of Yakahira's men. An outcry would bring only an audience of old men and women.

THEN the A-I man grinned as he tried a notion which swirled unbidden into his head. His right hand darted toward his coat pocket, as if for a weapon. The naked Japanese took two instinctive steps backward and collided with the approaching old worshiper. There was an ejaculation of surprise from the lantern bearer, a short shout of combined fear and rage from the man with the knife. The assassin, half turning, lifted his blade against this supposed rear attack; Moffat, springing forward, hurled the slippery body to the hard earth, where the brown man lay without moving.

A steely glitter showed where the knife had fallen, to catch light from the paper lantern. Moffat kicked it into the clump of bamboo.

Thin, precise words came to the white man's ears, jerkily uttered—

"It was a poor knife, my son, but should have served to let out a little pig's blood."

Eyes on the prostrate figure beneath him, Moffat smiled at the vengeful words. He bowed to the venerable Japanese, but said nothing. The man was old; in a moment he would have forgotten that *kammairi* must say nothing until the temple is reached and proper devotions made.

And then the second unexpected affair

of the night took place. The ancient Japanese returned Moffat's bow and, coming erect with effort, said unhappily:

"It is—the end. I—I can go no farther."

Moffat caught the scantily clad, thin old body before it reached the ground. For a moment, with the unconscious man in his arms, he stood stockstill, watching his assailant beginning to twitch back to his senses. The old fellow's advice was probably good. Nevertheless, Moffat knew he could never finish the partially conscious assassin.

So, swiftly now, he lifted the spare, lax figure he held in his arms and, without trouble, bore it toward his house.

It was good to be inside, secure, after the bitter cold. Moffat's boy, summoned from sleep, brought thick silken quilts for the ancient. The brazier's coals were blown to cherry-brightness, and the paper paneled room began to grow warm and comfortable. The old Japanese moaned when Moffat forced purple brandy down his throat, and at last his bird-like eyes opened. He lay under the quilts for several minutes, his eyes on the white man. Moffat continued smoking his cigaret and, as is proper, remained silent.

"I am still alive," the old man muttered.

"*Shikkari shiro.*" Andy Moffat smiled. "Bear up! Steady!"

He clapped his hands and called loudly for tea.

"You are the white man," the other said needlessly. "I am Kagawa Omura, and once, long ago, I was somebody." He looked at Moffat honestly and added, "Now, my son, I starve."

Moffat's bow was made just as the boy returned with bowls and pots. As the old man in the thin white kimono announced his name, the servant's eyes bulged and the hand holding the filled water pot trembled so that drops fell to the immaculate matting on the floor.

"O Kagawa-san," whimpered the servant, "you are returned? What will happen now?" He paused, then said, "Your daughter, O Great one—"

"Is not to be mentioned by you," Kagawa growled.

As food was brought, rice, pickled plums, things hastily taken from tins, the old man's demeanor changed until his face was pitiful. He tried to eat slowly, daintily, but it was obvious to Moffat that the man was indeed starving, and at the end of his courage. Bowl after bowl of tea was consumed, and at the end Kagawa said—

"A cigaret, my son, and I will be happy as is possible."

Moffat watched him draw the first pungent breath of smoke deep into his lungs and wondered at the change which had subtly come over the ancient. Before, the Japanese' cheeks had been wan, pinched; his eyes lusterless; his lips loose. Now purpose animated the old frame.

"You," Kagawa said slowly, "have saved my life, my son. What shall I do about it?"

"Live many years," responded Moffat, out of his lore of the East.

"*Hai!*" his guest snapped. "Life without honor is worthless, my son. Now that I am fed, that I have spoken since sundown, I cannot go to the temple; but I can do other things—perhaps as well as if I had prayed for success. This thing which I must do is—"

He stopped and scrutinized the white man steadily. What he saw—long, rangy body, quiet face with blue eyes like new ice on the village pond, browned, powerful fingers holding a cigaret without tremor—must have satisfied him, for he smiled.

"Have you liking for a man called Yakahira?" he asked.

Moffat controlled his surprise; he said quietly—

"Yakahira attempted to kill me this night, Kagawa-san."

"He did?"

"Through a coolie probably crazed with opium."

Kagawa nodded, as if he understood this. He said:

"That toad would never dare kill, himself. Well, it is obvious that he was not successful. Between us, my son, we will show him a trick or two, eh?"

"I don't know any tricks." Moffat grinned. "But—"

A gun roared. The K'uang H'i vase behind Moffat was shattered; bits of crimson porcelain spread over the floor. Moffat's hand shot to the lamp; in an instant the room was in darkness, save for the winking charcoal in the brazier. He was about to rush out, when old Kagawa caught at him with clenching fingers.

"Stop! Are you ready for death?"

A second shot, fired wildly, brought a scream of fear from Moffat's boy in the next room.

In the dark, the white man fumbled in his desk. Gun in hand, he waited for attack; none came. It was so silent now that the gentle sound of a blind woman's whistle sounded tremendous in the night.

Kagawa whispered:

"It must have been Yakahira himself. He will never risk entering. He saw shadows in the room, standing out blackly against the paper panels, and aimed at one of them. The gods saw to it that he aimed at the vase. Well? What will you do now?"

"Go see Yakahira and smash his face for him."

"So? You have nothing else to suggest?"

"He will not dare kill me, in daylight, with people about," Maffat said grimly, understanding the other's objection. "I'll tie him in knots and kick him from one end of the village to the other."

"That beast can buy witnesses. He has done it before. I know this. If you will listen to me, I may be of some slight assistance. You see, my son, I have little cause to love Yakahira. What did he do to you? A wife stolen? Or was it merely a matter of money?"

Moffat said shortly:

"He doesn't want me here. That's all."

"And so you are going away?"

The white man said calmly—

"Will you smoke another of my poor cigarets, Kagawa-san?"

The ancient made a contented noise, half chuckle, half growl.

"Good," he said. "I owe you a life—mine. Perhaps I can give you a life in return."

In the dark, Moffat bowed. He said gravely:

"My thanks. However, I must settle this myself, in my own way. You are in honorable old age, and Yakahira is a young and strong man. I—"

KAGAWA'S old voice rose like wind in the pines. He forgot that any one might be listening, or perhaps felt positive that the attacker in the night would run away after firing his shots.

"And I?" he demanded. "What has Yakahira done to me? I lived in this village also, my son. Yakahira coveted my poor belongings. My house, my goods, my child. He has all of them—all save the ceremonial bowls given my family by the third shogun. All these things he has—taken while I made *geta* strings in a prison, sent there on his accusation of theft, convicted by false evidence given by lying witnesses, paid twice and thrice for their perjuries. He has everything which was once mine, excepting only the priceless bowls of the River of the—"

Kagawa's lips closed tightly. He smoothed the silk of the quilt covering him. In a whisper, he continued:

"He might as well have them also. Yes! I will give them to him. He will appreciate the long journey I have made to take them from their hiding place and present them. It is what he deserves for being such a great and wealthy man."

Moffat supposed that age, exhaustion, the effects of steaming tea, plentiful food, potent brandy, had unhinged the old fellow's tired brain. Gently, he suggested rest.

"It is late. Sleep, honorable grandfather. I will watch to see that Yakahira does not trouble this house again."

"So I sound like a fool? *Sayo demo gozaimasho ga.* That is probably true, but—well, we shall see." More lightly, "Yes, I will sleep. I need my wits and my strength. There are things to be done in the morning, which I believe will give me much pleasure."

Moffat's ears became attuned to the shallow, regular breathing. Once he heard the curious guest mutter, "The River of the Sky" and, again, "Life for life." After that, sleep took the old Japanese deeply from reason or thought, and he huddled deeply, warmly, into the thick *zabuton.*

In the next room Moffat found his boy crouched beside the paper partition, a long cooking knife in his hand. One bean oil lamp burned feebly in a far corner. The boy's teeth were chattering together in terror.

"You will have prayers said at my grave?" the servant pleaded. "I am about to die, *danna-san.*"

"You are about to sit beside Kagawa-san in the other room for a few minutes," Moffat informed him curtly. "And if you fall asleep, I will cut off your ears. What is this talk of dying?"

"While I prepared food, a man with a black cloth over his face, like a night demon, entered. He held a knife before my heart and gave me a small bottle. 'Put this in your master's tea,' he ordered. 'If you forget, you will yourself be dead before the second meal tomorrow.' "

"Did you do as he told you, Matsu?"

"I—I forgot," stammered the boy.

"For that," Moffat told him, "you will receive not only two gold yen, but a holiday in which to spend them."

"What good will money be to me when I am dead?"

"Go sit beside Kagawa-san and figure on ways to spend your gold. You aren't going to die, foolish one."

"You—you promise it?"

"I promise," Moffat assured him.

The boy stared up at him and then sighed with relief.

"You are a powerful *danna-san,*" he said more bravely. "You have never lied. I believe you. I will guard the sleeping lord—"

Moffat had guessed as much. Kagawa must have been the powerful figure in the village until Yakahira had grown in importance and wealth; then the half-caste had removed the old Samurai as ruthlessly as he proposed to get rid of the white man. He waited until Matsu, knife clutched tightly, crept into the main room of the house, and then himself slipped outside. He dropped to earth at once, half expectant of a shot, and then watched and listened intently.

In his garden, water dripped into the pool, a drowsy tinkling; there was no other sound. Black, distant, the great temple lifted its chiseled pinnacles, the outlines blurred against the inky sky. Inside, the worshipers, half clad, nude, must have finished their devotions; soon the streets would brighten with the flicker of lanterns borne by returning *kammairi.* Moffat knew the interior of the temples. The storks standing upon tortoises of rock. The serpents and monsters writhing among the gods in their fretted niches, tier above tier. The pictured foulnesses, the divinities of abomination, painted in scarlet and blue and gold. After this long service, the incense would be rising to the inverted bowls of lamps, and wriggling like live snakes into the light sprayed upward to the blue vault of the ceiling.

It came to Moffat, as he searched the garden with his eyes, that all of these bowls were named. There was the bowl of Morning Illusions, the bowl of the Azure Darkness, of Fiery Delight, of Perpetual Life. Four bowls of light. He was positive of that; hadn't some Englishman come to the village to photograph them, and hadn't he gone with the chap while it was being done, to see that the priests were friendly during the performance. Four bowls. Well, what was this River of the Sky bowl which old

Kagawa had mentioned?

In some way, Moffat believed, the confusion of the Japanese's otherwise sensible mind had caused him to mix up his own former possessions, and the sacred belongings of the temple. The River of the Sky—pretty phrase, but, so far as Moffat could see, entirely meaningless.

He had more important things to think about. Yakahira—that Eurasian. And, now that he concentrated on the affair, just what could he do? If he reported the matter to the Asiatic-Import at Tokyo, Jim Carstairs would go to the authorities, and at the same time be wishing that Andy Moffat would handle his district himself instead of bawling for help. Not only that, but what could the authorities do? Yakahira would deny everything and say that the white man was unable to meet his competition, and the authorities, with little love for Americans, would agree with him. Officially, at least. Anything else would cause investigations. More, it was extremely probable that Yakahira had friends, as witness the downfall of old Kagawa, years before.

Laying hands on the halfcaste would not do at all. Yakahira would complain at once, and get away with it. The authorities would be satisfied, pleased to have an excuse to rid the country of a little unwelcome foreign competition. Even if he had caught the sly Yakahira red handed in the garden after the shots were fired, the halfcaste would have denied everything. Moffat's witness, Kagawa, would have been discredited as a former prisoner, with animus against the Eurasian. Matsu, the houseboy, would have no standing in court, being in Moffat's service.

Moffat thought:

"If I've got to get out of here, I'm going to take one good poke at the skunk, no matter how much Carstairs roars at the trouble it'll be bound to kick up. One good poke at that big belly."

This—a beating—was undoubtedly what the tricky Eurasian feared. Yakahira would be certain that the white man must recognize failure, but that before Moffat left the village he would, white man fashion, use his fists. Therefore Yakahira, careful of his big, well fed body, must have intended making positive that no vengeance would be visited upon him. Moffat was to have been killed this very night. Moffat decided that the reason he had been given warning was to let Yakahira satisfy his sense of power, of ordering the white man away. That was good halfcaste reasoning. Enable Yakahira to show his superiority, despite his mixed blood.

What would some of the other, older A-I men have done? How would gaunt Westgaard have acted? Or laughing, dangerous Johnny M'Intosh? Will Soames? The gigantic Carter Hanson? Would they have been frightened off?

Young Andy Moffat's lip curled. Just the same, what was he going to do about it? Inaction irked him. Against good judgment, he left his retreat and, gun ready, stormed all over the garden. He found exactly nothing.

THE remainder of the night, until the black pinnacles of the temple turned to gray, and the sun glinted on the pyramid of gods and humans carved, interlocked, under the eaves of the tiles, Andy Moffat sat beside the sleeping old man, refusing against all reason to admit defeat.

No sooner was the cold Winter sun out of the hills than the isolated village quickened to life. In every yard men and women gathered about open air fires, on which rice steamed to glutinous masses; before long there sounded the muffled slap-slap of pestles pounding against mortars filled with the sticky grains. Rice cakes, for the holidays of the cold season.

Old Kagawa's eyes moved, as if the constant muffled noise distressed him. Not until a man broke into singing, somewhere near, did the ancient Japanese really open his eyes. He said then:

"*O hayo gozarimasu.* I thought I was

again in prison, and that I was hearing bare feet against stone. Every morning I heard that dreadful sound. The master of the prison knew me for a man of honor, and did not force me to arise with the sun . . . Well, I have long looked forward to this day, and here it is. I trust Yakahira is praying. He has need of prayers."

The boy brought tea for Kagawa, coffee for Moffat, serving the old man first.

"Hm-m," Kagawa said. "Your name is Matsu. Your father was a sweeper coolie. I remember you by the scar on your cheek where Yakahira lashed you."

The houseboy bobbed his head and sucked in his breath vehemently.

"There are few in this village who have cause to love Yakahira," Kagawa went on, sipping the boiling hot tea. "At his death there should be a great celebration. Have you good kimonos to wear for it, Matsu?"

Matsu spread out his hands.

"I will examine the best I own," he said, smiling.

Moffat wished he had some of the boy's assurance.

"Go examine them," commanded the old lord of the village. "You may be wearing them before you realize it. First, however, tell me—you have two brothers? Yes? Good! Bend nearer to me." Kagawa lowered his voice. "Go to Shiage the priest. Say to him only this, 'Kagawa says there is fire in the river of the sky.' Is that plain to you?"

"Kagawa says there is fire in the river of the sky."

"That is it. Shiage the priest will give you packages, carefully wrapped. There will be several—three. Each of your brothers carries one; you carry the third. You bring them here as soon as possible. You understand?"

"Yes, master."

"Do this now. Without waste of time. If any one stops you, or asks your business, you can truthfully say that you do not know what is in the packages." Kagawa waited until his bowl was refilled with tea; then he said, "If you stumble, or fall, or fail to do what I have ordered—what punishment does your *danna-san* promise you when you fail in duties?"

"The *danna-san* says he will cut off my ears."

"You know me," Kagawa growled. "*I* will cut them off!" As the boy sped out of the room, the old Japanese said to Moffat, "You are too easy with him. It is not the way to advance in the world —I was the same way."

Moffat finished his coffee and lighted a cigaret.

"Kagawa-san, I can not let you kill this fiendish halfcaste. It will mean prison for you the rest of your life—"

"Which will not be long."

"And I will be responsible."

"*Mah!* For a half dozen years I have thought of nothing save seeing the man in death. I have lived for nothing else. And I have a debt to pay to you; life for life. You saved mine. I will give you one in return and, if the gods will forgive my failure to worship them last night, it will not be mine I offer you. Now, give me paper and brush. I wish to write a message to Yakahira."

Moffat brought writing utensils; the old man, without hesitation, wrote in grass-hand:

> To Yakahira, Man of Greatness:
>
> Kagawa Omura, a person of no importance, has returned to the village to see his daughter, who is a member of your household.

Here the ancient paused, brush poised; he said to Moffat:

"He did not even make her a wife, my son. She is treated like a *ne-san!* The daughter of a Samurai! I have a long score against Yakahira." Then he began to write again:

> If you will grant this favor to a father, who is very old and sad, I will present you with my one remaining possession. Perhaps you do not want a gift so poor. However, this miserable person begs to be permitted to give you the porcelains from which shoguns and emperors have taken tea, including the bowl known as the River of the Sky.
>
> Perhaps also, out of your goodness and wis-

> dom, you will permit a white man from across the sea to leave this village in peace. He is very frightened because of your bravery, and has asked me to plead for his life.

"And that—" Kagawa grinned maliciously—"will settle everything."

Moffat read the beautifully written message.

"Can't you see your child without giving him the last thing you own?" he demanded. "The message must be rewritten. I admit I don't know what to do, and that Yakahira has me up a tree, but I don't want to leave this village. Not even feet first," Andy added in English.

"Is that a plea to your gods?" Kagawa asked, hearing the strange words.

"No," Moffat said shortly. "I haven't any intention to run away. That's all."

"Who said you should run away?" the old man snapped. "If you had even thought of it, do you think I would trouble myself about you? *Hai-ya!* You may have opportunity to fight, before all of this is over. That is the way with white men. They must batter with their fists, but I—I am old. My days of active fighting are over. So I must use my brain to achieve vengeance, and repay a debt—and do it all so cleverly that I will not spend my last days elsewhere than in my own village . . . Now, I have talked enough. Give me a cigaret, my son; I wish to consider many things."

THE curious pair, bland, wrinkled old Japanese, white man wearied with inaction, smoked side by side until Matsu and his brothers returned with the three packages. Without a glance at them, the old man said:

"Good. Take this writing, Matsu, and give it to the first child you see. Tell him to take it to the house of Yakahira, and bring the answer back to me, here. Thank your brothers in my name, and say to them that soon I will reward them—when I am again lord of the village."

With Moffat's assistance—Kagawa first having been wrapped in warmer clothing—the ancient began to unfasten the silken thongs of the packages. Piece by piece, Moffat saw the most magnificent porcelains he had ever seen in the empire. Pale soft yellows, furnace-crimsons, belled like the cups of flowers. Bowls the dead-gold of Autumn leaves, bowls splendid in sable and silver, like a night riven with lightning. The porcelains had come from *kaoling* and *tun,* clay and quartz, sifted a hundred times in running water, kneaded a hundred times by tireless hands, which mingled the creamy paste at last with colors now forgotten to the artists.

At last only one silk wrapped bowl remained to be uncovered. The silken bag about it was lustrous black; it was marked with the imperial insignia. Old Kagawa held it in his hands, and then slowly undid the drawstring.

If the other porcelains were marvelous, this was matchless. Celestial azure sown with star dust of white and silver, representing the Milky Way—the River of the Sky. The current of the star drift seemed to shift and move. And when Kagawa carefully held the bowl to the light, Moffat saw that the porcelain itself, where the Milky Way weaved across the blue sky on the bowl, seemed thinner, as if the maker had managed to cut away some of the original clay to give the appearance of bright tiny stars.

For a moment the white man forgot the impending trouble with Yakahira. Here was treasure-trove indeed—the sort of thing the A-I men were always looking for, and seldom finding. The price the Asiatic-Import would pay for the porcelains would have made Kagawa a rich man.

The ancient glanced at him shrewdly, waited for an offer to be made, and then said:

"We are gentlemen, my son. No bargaining. The bowls must be given to Yakahira. Later, who knows what may happen? If—"

Matsu bowed his way to the place

where Kagawa knelt and handed him the badly written message:

> If Kagawa will come immediately to my house, I will accept the gift and permit him to see his daughter. Since Kagawa has been so foolish as to stay at the house of the Hairy Foreigner, he can tell the *seiyo-jin* to accompany him to my house. There the matter will be settled.

"'Walk into my parlor,' said the spider to the fly!" Moffat grinned. "Yakahira gets me there, and his men carve me up."

"Are you going with me?"

"Why not?" Moffat said shortly.

Kagawa rubbed his dry hands together happily.

"I like you better the more I know you." He smiled. "Yakahira will not kill you—not, at least, in his house. With us will go Shiage the priest, and several of his fellows. Witnesses are needed, just as Yakahira intends to have witnesses of your death, and mine. *Hai!* The longer this goes on the more I enjoy it. Plot and counterplot! Everything depends upon one thing, and if I have guessed Yakahira correctly, we do not need to worry about that. Now, we must wrap up the bowls, and then we will pay our visit, bringing presents—"

"Greeks bearing gifts," Moffat muttered in English. "Let's hope so, anyhow!"

He was about to bend down to help rewrap the porcelains, when a shadow on the screen made him race to an outer panel. He thrust it aside swiftly, and saw some one running through the garden. His gun was out and up before Kagawa was able to cry:

"Let him go! He will only report to Yakahira that the bowls can be expected, which is well. Now, let us go carefully to the temple and get Shiage the priest. We go only along streets where there are many people. I trust Yakahira as little as you, and with good cause."

It was a strange procession after the augmented party left the principal temple of the village. First Shiage, an old priest in rusty black, with the pointed hat of Shinto above his wizened face; next Kagawa, limping along painfully, buoyed up by the thoughts in his wise head; Moffat, head and shoulders above the Japanese, wondering exactly what was going to happen, but nevertheless positive that the gun in his pocket ought to account for Yakahira, even if the Eurasian's men overpowered him. Last, four priests, all in black, who had merely been told to use their eyes and miss nothing of what might happen.

Between Kagawa and Shiage there seemed little need for words. Neither spoke as they marched through the village.

Once Moffat heard:

"The *danna-san* is afraid of Yakahira. He takes the priests with him to beg for mercy."

Again:

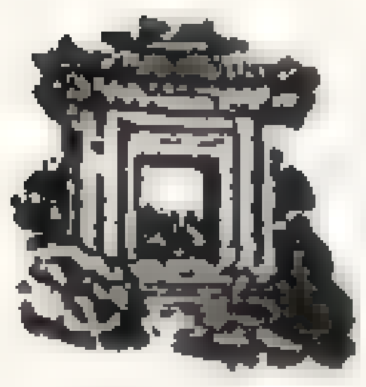
"The oldest old man! That is Kagawa-san, once our lord. He, also, goes to ask mercy of Yakahira."

The answers to both, from listening villagers, were the same.

"Yakahira has become a great man."

Kagawa spat at each answer, as if to take a nauseating taste from his mouth; Moffat's anger was growing, not only because of his lost prestige, but because he did not yet see what could be done about it. One white man in the heart of North Japan! It was pretty much of a mess, and yet the whole affair, even with his life involved, was mighty interesting. The bowl of the River of the Sky! What mysterious meaning did it have? What was Kagawa's reliance on a bit of porcelain, even porcelain as marvelous as the blue and silver bowl?

Moffat saw but one possibility; he might be able to enrage Yakahira to the point of drawing knife or gun, and then finish him. If the halfcaste would attack first, he had the right to protect himself, and the priests would make as good, or better, witnesses than Yakahira's men. This actually was the real reason why Moffat had been willing to go to the Eurasian's house; he was ready, prepared, and believed he knew enough about Yakahira to drive the halfcaste into insane rage. Whatever Kagawa intended would be nothing so elemental. The Japanese's plan would be complicated, very subtle and probably impossible; yet Kagawa seemed sure of himself as he shuffled in the head priest's footsteps along the chilly streets.



AS THEY neared the Way of the Pomegranate, and Yakahira's house, Moffat saw four heavy set Japanese watching them; these men fell in behind the four priests like a well trained chorus, amply cutting off retreat. If any of the priests saw what had happened, they paid no attention, but continued marching forward, carrying the packages of porcelains. Moffat thought:

"Good night! Even if I have it out with Yakahira, I can't get away afterward. Poor old Kagawa wouldn't have a chance, and these thugs don't care a hang about priests. Yokohama scum—"

The single comforting thing was the gun in his pocket.

Villagers watched from their doorways. Silk looms ceased their clatter. Something was in the air, which none understood. Save for the advancing party and the men cat-stepping behind, the street was empty. On other ways rickshaw men pat-patted here and there, pulling their carts, venders cried their wares, coolies rushed about with burdens, but the Way of the Pomegranate was strangely silent.

A gate swung open, propelled outward by a burly Japanese, who admitted the curious party without a single proper word of welcome. All walked across the barren courtyard. The house, instead of being formed of paper panels, was of wood, with shutters over the windows. Kagawa dropped back to Moffat's side. As the front door was opened he muttered—

"The place stinks of treachery."

And then, head down, he went inside, looking a broken, wretched man.

George Yakahira was standing on a foreign made carpet laid over the floor's matting. When he saw Shiage, his smile thinned. The presence of the four other priests froze the expression on his face to an evil grimace. He snarled instantly—

"What does this mean?"

Shiage the priest said placidly:

"We have been keeping something for Kagawa-san. He told us, years ago, that it was proper for him to retain it, instead of giving it as restitution to the authorities. Now he desires to present it as a gift to you, and we have come to see for ourselves that we have kept nothing against the law."

Yakahira, satisfied, smiled broadly.

"*Yoroshi!* Quite right! Let us examine this gift."

Kagawa whined—

"Am I not to see my daughter?"

"He does not trust me." The Eurasian laughed. "Yomé, come!"

She was beaten down, the woman Yomé. Once, she must have been beautiful. A kimono of rusty brown covered a thin body; her hands were rough and cracked with cold. Coarse white stockings covered her feet.

Moffat, watching Kagawa, saw the ancient's nostrils quiver slightly. The old Samurai said tonelessly—

"The years have been long, daughter."

The dull glaze of Yomé's eyes broke, showing something like fire beneath. She glanced up, until gaze met gaze; then she sighed and her head dropped. Moffat could guess what change prison, sadness, mortification had made in the old man.

"You have seen her," snapped Yakahira. "Back to your work, Yomé! Now, old one, give me the—gift."

Kagawa said a word to the priests, who handed their burdens to the halfcaste. Moffat wondered that Kagawa did not ask for a moment more, another word, the pressure of a hand, but the Japanese seemed entirely acquiescent. Yakahira paid no more attention to

Moffat than if the white man had been one of the under priests, but the four burly Japanese, and the doorman as well, kept their eyes on him every instant.

With greedy hands Yakahira tore off the silk cords. One by one the bowls were revealed.

Now the halfcaste addressed Moffat.

"Thirty-seven of them," he said in English. "How much'd you say they'd bring, Moffat?"

"Whatever's asked," Moffat said shortly.

"I'll ask plenty," gloated the Eurasian.

The white man said—

"You would."

He was totally unprepared for the snarl which came to the other's lips.

"Yes? That's all you know! I'm going to keep the finest of the bowls for myself. I'll drink out of the same porcelain as emperors. I'll—"

"If you will give us hot tea, as is proper," said Shiage the priest, "we will return to the temple."

Yakahira was pleased to be gracious. His shout for hot water, for tea, shook the house. While it was being brought, he said pleasantly—

"After the others go, Moffat, I want to have a little talk with you, eh?"

Moffat knew the outcome of that talk. His eyes, as he agreed, ranged about the room. Shuttered windows. One door, undoubtedly guarded. Six to one; not good odds for him. Best place to make his stand would be the nearest corner, under the rack of long Samurai blades, each in its silken container. Would it come to that? What was Kagawa's purpose in coming—in what would it result? The old Japanese lord stood with hanging head, muttering to himself.

The water steamed in the pot. Two maid servants, bright eyed village maids, stirred powdered green tea in a common earthenware bowl; the added water made of it a thick paste. When it was prepared properly, and the maids were about to infuse the leaves, Kagawa said very slowly:

"Last night, O Yakahira-san, this *danna-san* took me into his house. I was cold; he warmed me. I was hungry, and I was fed. Perhaps I might have died. Only the gods know, I owe him a debt, Yakahira-san. He fears you. Will you do me a favor, and allow him to depart in peace?"

"Where he goes—" Yakahira grinned —"there is eternal peace."

"That is your last word?"

"My last word? Who are you to speak of my words? Am I to be held responsible if the Hairy One attacks me, and I defend myself, in the presence of witnesses? Am I?"

"Not at all," said Kagawa humbly. "Of course, if you did not order him to remain, he could depart?"

"Of course." The halfcaste laughed. "Now, old one, drink your tea. I have other business this day."

KAGAWA took the bowl of tea handed him; he looked first at it, and then at the alert white man. Moffat could have sworn that the old Japanese winked at him. Moffat was ready instantly, if this were a sign to him that the priests—lean enough, and sad enough looking fellows—were to start a fight. Kagawa, staring into the green contents of his bowl, said mournfully:

"A favor for myself, Yakahira-san. May I be permitted, this final time, to drink from the River of the Sky?"

"What is that?"

Putting down the coarse porcelain he held, Kagawa bent and picked up the azure and silver bowl.

"Emperors have used it," he said. "Samurai and shoguns. None less than a great lord's lips have ever touched its brim. I would drink from it once more, before it is no longer possible."

Yakahira took the bowl marked with the Milky Way from Kagawa's hands. The star dust path shone clearly on the blue surface.

"This is the one I will keep," Yakahira said happily. "Great men have used it; a great man will use it now!" He held it out to a maidservant. "Rinse it," he commanded. "Then fill it for your master."

Once, twice, three times the maid filled and emptied the azure bowl, swiftly, efficiently; then she filled it with steaming tea. Yakahira was about to place it to his lips when Kagawa said abruptly:

"You will not let me drink from it? See—I beg, I plead. I am on my knees! O Yakahira-san, I implore! I am an old man. You have sent me to prison. You have taken my daughter. Allow me this one thing only! Let me have the River of the Sky in my hands; let me drink from it."

Yakahira had been holding the priceless porcelain in his two hands. The groveling of the former lord of the village put him in excellent humor. Moffat, for his part, could not look at the demonstration of abjectness. In a few minutes he would be fighting for his life—bad enough, but far better than being cut down in the night. Then, curiously, he saw something had happened to the pictured Milky Way on the azure bowl. Tea, in the porcelain, seemed to have turned the silvery whiteness to unlovely and nauseous green. Moffat supposed that the tea color showed through the thinner part of the porcelain.

Without a word, Yakahira lifted the River of the Sky to his lips and sucked down the tea noisily.

"Hot tea," he boasted. "When tea is brought me insufficiently heated, I beat whoever serves it—including your daughter, Kagawa."

Rising to his feet, Kagawa's expression had subtly changed. There was satisfaction in it, and real interest.

"Is it so?" he said politely.

"Hot tea," repeated Yakahira. "Hot! I—I am hot myself."

"The River of the Sky warms one," Kagawa said placidly. "You will be very warm indeed, Yakahira. Warm, and—" He hesitated ominously.

"And what?" Yakahira muttered.

"Cold!"

The halfcaste stared about the room. He said uneasily to one of the burly men:

"Yaku, do not jump about like that! I will not have it!" The man called Yaku had not moved. "I—my eyes—my throat! Tight! Tight!"

Old Kagawa slipped to Moffat's side in the near corner under the sword rack.

"Watch," he said softly. "And be ready, my son."

Yakahira's breath was coming short and harsh, with long intervals between each of them; his yellowish skin was blue, his eyes wide and staring. A bit of foam came to his lips. He swayed violently, trying to speak, and then fell, convulsed, to the bright carpet. The bowl called the River of the Sky fell with him, shattering into a thousand bits of blue.

Kagawa said swiftly:

"You have all seen! He drank his own tea; it must have been poisoned. None of us had anything to do with it. Would I have asked to drink, had I known what was in the bowl?"

The four priests put down their own tea, but Shiage, thoughtlessly, sipped his own infusion. One of the lesser priests hastily knocked it from his lips. Shiage smiled wryly, but said nothing.

The writhing body of Yakahira stiffened into rigidity. Both maid servants ran from the room, terrified lest they be accused of poisoning their master. The burly Japanese named Yaku had taken a knife out of his kimono sleeve, and looked at the heavy blade.

"You will stay here, old man; you also, Hairy Foreigner. You—"

Suavely, Kagawa suggested:

"Your master, Yakahira, who is now very dead, said that if he did not order the *danna-san* to remain, he was free to depart. And so we are going."

Moffat recognized the stubborn mind of the low class Nipponese. Yaku and his fellows had been told that the white man was to be murdered and, even with their master dead, would attempt to carry out his orders; would be delighted to kill for the pleasure of killing.

"No," said Yaku. "He stays. And so do you, old man."

Kagawa smiled.

"Have it as you will," he said, as seeing the futility of argument. To Moffat he said softly, "Ready!"

And, with rapidity totally unexpected, he whirled around and ripped one of the long two handed swords from the rack. Almost the same movement bared the blue blade, and Kagawa, the smile still on his face, swung the weapon in a great circle.

"Out of my way!" he cried.

* * *

THE five Japanese, surprised, gave ground. Yaku's knife arm lifted; before he could poise his weapon to throw, Moffat fired. The lesser priests burst into loud prayer. Shiage's lips moved also, but in no invocation to the gods. As Yaku stumbled and clutched at his chest, his companions evaded the uncertain swing of Kagawa's sword and closed in.

Moffat was afraid to fire into the press of bodies. He tore forward, smashing the barrel of his gun on the nearest skull, and then tried fiercely to pull the assassins from the fallen body of the old Japanese. A man turned and hacked at him. Then he heard a scream of agony, and a second and third, running the gamut from pain to agony. The fourth of the bravos attempted to get away, but a wild swing of a heavy blade cut him down. The back swing almost took off Moffat's arm.

Shiage, robe tucked up to his knees, was dancing about, his sword beating the air.

"Fight me!" he cried. "I have been in no prison! I am not half starved! I—" His words died as he dropped beside Kagawa. "I am a priest," he said sadly, "who forgot his vows. Oh, Kagawa, are you dying?"

Kagawa opened one amused eye.

"No," he said.

After a moment he went on, to Moffat:

"I have given you a number of lives in return for mine. That would seem as if I thought I were a great person, but I do not. If your bullet had been slower, my son, that knife would have finished me; again I am in your debt, but I do not mind that. Now—" slyly—"my friend Shiage will be forced to do many penances."

"I do not mind," the priest said quietly. "It is a better world now."

Supported by Moffat, Kagawa stood up.

"I will call my daughter," he said. "You, O priests, can swear we were attacked and defended ourselves. You can swear that Yakahira died from a draft of which we knew nothing. It is what a man might call a perfect justice." Glancing at the bits of azure porcelain with more interest than at either Yakahira's silent body or the wounded assassins, Kagawa said, "The River of the Sky has served the purpose for which it was made."

Moffat was unable to wait longer.

"How could an empty bowl kill Yakahira? The tea wasn't poisoned. Shiage drank some of it."

"Where you saw the river crossing the sky, there was less porcelain than in the remaining portion of the bowl. Light showed through; you saw that. On the outside of the bowl the material was sound and hard, but the inside—over the thinner part—was made of something which melts in warm water. You will remember I had Yakahira pause before he finally drank? I wanted to make sure. And between the porcelain and false surface was—"

"Poison," Moffat said.

From the manner of Yakahira's death, Moffat knew that the drug had been one of the cyanides.

"Exactly. I would have told you my plan, but feared that you might betray interest when Yakahira lifted the bowl to his lips. I knew he would drink. Now, I have had safe vengeance, but am again in debt to you for my life. This time, may I give you the bowls? Perhaps they are of some very slight value."

"I'll buy them," Moffat said, thinking of what the Tokyo office would say about the magnificent porcelains. "I won't have them any other way."

"As you wish." Kagawa shrugged. "Perhaps the money will enable me to smoke a cigaret when I am tired."

"You can purchase houses and servants with what we'll pay for the bowls."

Kagawa, smiling, shrugged again.

"The price," he said, "is of no importance—but may I have a cigaret now?"

When Moffat took the priceless bowls to Tokyo he explained to the A-I men there that, although these porcelains were magnificent, the finest of them all had been broken. The biggest fish, the Asiatic-Import fellows told him, always got away, and for trying to come that sort of yarn on them, he could buy the next drink. No porcelains could be finer than the lot he had brought down from the north. For young Andy Moffat to have been able to get them at all was considered a stroke of luck.

Not until the fourth brandy and soda, when Moffat was coaxed to tell his somewhat envious colleagues how he had been able to obtain the bowls, did the weathered A-I men fully understand that Moffat was now really one of them, instead of a boasting youngster.

THE RAW BRONC—

Breaking Him to Stake

AS TOLD BY GIL STRICK TO ALAN LEMAY

I CAN lick the guy who says that I can not break and train a cow horse by mail order correspondence. Don't take my word for it; here—take the following instructions and try it yourself:

First catch a horse; then, in the order named, break him to stake, gentle him, saddle, bridle, ride him—are you following me?—teach him to travel, back, rein, rope, hold a critter, cut cattle, and maybe jump fence. There you are—simple; and if after a reasonable trial, say five years, you find that you can not turn out a good cow horse by this method, we will positively give you your money back.

Take for instance the first step—catching the horse. In catching a range bred colt who has spent the first four years of his life running free in two or three hundred square miles of pasture, you have your choice of several very practical methods. The easiest method, and the one the most popular among the cowmen with whom I have come in contact, is to say, "Gil, so long as you are going down that way, just bring that roan colt along back and put him in the corral." For ease and simplicity, so far as you are concerned, there is positively nothing to beat this way.

But in case this method fails, or even backfires, so that you are unfortunately sent after the animal yourself, there are several other ways to accomplish the same thing. The best liked way is to ride out and round up the colt and run him home and into the corral. This is an excellent method, but it is liable to develop one bad feature; the colt maybe won't go in the corral. This practically ruins the effectiveness of the method. If he keeps breaking back on you, you will pretty soon begin to look like a honey man trying to chase a bee through his hat; and this is very entertaining for the rancher's pretty daughter, who is pretty sure to be looking on, but it will not catch the horse.

IN THIS case I suggest that you turn around and fog the mustang in the opposite direction; and this being the direction in which he is trying to go anyway, you will probably look more successful, and feel better. For this purpose a good long line of fence is a great help. If you do not have any fence with you, the high side of a ditch is very good; though needless to say, though you have been troubled by fences and ditches all Summer, there isn't going to be any there when you want it. I suppose it is not necessary to say this, but some people need everything explained to them, so I will put in here that I do not recommend building a ditch for this purpose.

The idea of the fence or ditch is that this fixes it so there is at least one direction he cannot break away. In any case, your best bet now is to ride hell for leather in hope of overtaking him. Of course you realize this scared young bronc ahead of you is maybe the worst thing in the world to catch; but, as the jackrabbits jump ahead of him, and he passes them by ones and twos, do not be discouraged; because facts and figures, gathered together at great expense over a period of years, show that you really have one chance in ten of coming up close enough to him to put on the rope.

In the course of breaking and training the bronc, this is as good a time as any to go back to the ranch for help. You had now better rout out the boss, and explain to him that of all the broke-down nags who ever galloped all day in the shade of a cabbage plant, Bacon Rind, the horse you are riding, is outstandingly the worst; that all he is good for is to keep a man about five feet off the ground, and that you have spent the day practically afoot, except with the added disadvantage that you couldn't reach the ground with your feet; and that though you have tried getting off Bacon Rind and running on ahead, you have been unable to catch the roan bronc.

It is possible that the boss will now explain to you that you have been riding one of the fastest horses in the country, and one that undoubtedly could catch any mustang that ever drew breath, if only he wasn't handicapped by maybe the worst rein-pushing ratchet-head that ever threw his horse's head away. He saw you go bouncing along, hanging on first one side and then the other, and he wants to know why you seemed to be kicking the wind out of the brute at suitable intervals. And he seriously questions are you sure you untied your horse before you started out, or is that a fencepost he sees trailing from your macarty? You may ignore all this, as it has little or nothing to do with the further breaking and training of the colt.

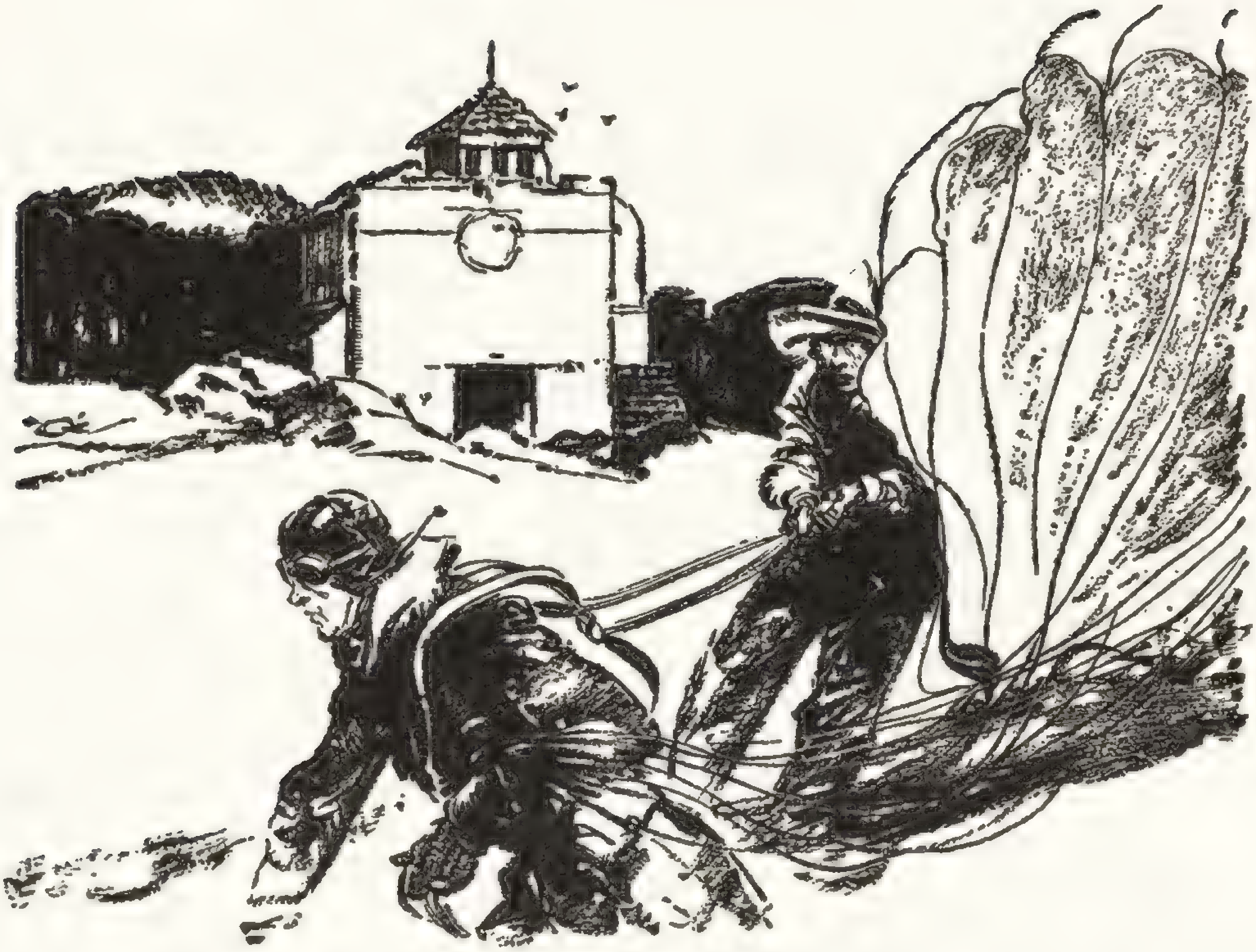
Having virtually won the argument with the boss, but still riding Bacon Rind, you now go out again with another rider to help you. This time take your post on Bacon Rind a hundred or a hundred and fifty yards from the ditch bank. The other rider now breezes the roan bronc down the line of the ditch in your direction. In case you do not have any ditch, the other rider will have to serve the purpose of both himself and the ditch; but inasmuch as he is going to say when he gets back to the bunkhouse that he finally caught the horse, this should be all right with you. As the colt comes near, you throw the rib wrenches to Bacon Rind and close in on the bronc in a V-line, pinching off the colt against the ditch or fence, or between yourself and the other rider.

NOW you make your throw with your riata, and you can do one of two things. One way is to catch both his forefeet in a figure eight loop, one foot being supposed to go through each loop of the figure eight; this kind of a throw is made by making a regular throw at his front feet and then twisting the riata so that the loop crosses itself. This as good as hobbles his front feet, and you only have to dally your riata to bust him flat. The idea of this method is to break his neck. Which serves him right for not going in the corral in the first place.

Most riders, though, will not wait to complete the breaking and training of the colt so quick, and an ordinary throw will be made, catching him around the withers. It is then a simple matter to choke the colt down and stop him as the loop closes on his throat. Don't forget, though, that before you choke him down you'll have to drag the rope upward from his withers to this neck; choking him around the shoulders is difficult in the extreme, and should not be attempted by the beginner.

Now all you will have to do is to get the brute back to the corral, and for this I suggest main strength. Now the neck stretching begins, together with bawling, plunging against the rope, striking at it with the fore feet, and in every way putting up the toughest fight possible. (You understand, the colt is doing this—these are not instructions for the rider.) And at this point you will readily see why it is absolutely essential to have the leather necked colts. The rubber neck colt simply will not do, and if any are run against, they may as well be discarded. The terrific snap-back you get when a rubber neck colt breaks the rope is liable to throw colt, horse, rider, and anybody who happens to be watching.

Now that you have the colt back in the corral, the next step will be to break the colt to stake. What I started to say was, I meant to explain how a colt is broke to stake. But due to lack of space, this will have to be passed up for the time being; and I will try to get back to it later, under the head of new business.



THE dust on the polo field had settled. The ponies, swathed in floating cotton coolers, were led away. Some stumbled on wearied legs. Their heads hung close to the dusty desert ground. Horns shrieked from the automobiles, tight packed about the sideboards. The winning team bunched in front of the grandstand to take the great silver bowl from the general's wife. She smiled graciously into their sweat grimed, streaked, grinning faces. The general boomed out his familiar praise, lauding these four who had won—won by a single goal.

And that goal had been scored by Crocker. Once too often he had tried that fancy stroke under his horse's neck, instead of backing it as he should have. The ball had deflected from the shaft, caromed from the goal post, bounded through—and won the game for the rival regiment. What a laugh . . .

Crocker went back to his quarters alone. He sensed that the others avoided him, though they had all said a few words of commiseration before leaving.

"Tough luck. Any of us might have done it. Just a break of the game . . ."

But Crocker knew it wasn't tough luck, that any of the others might not have done it. It wasn't just a break of the game.

He lay in the hot water of his bath, trying not to think. He was bruised all over. His arm ached awfully where that back stroke of Kennedy's had hit him. His back gave him agony; the jarring stops of his ponies had taken a toll of the muscles there. The skin was ripped from the inside of his knees. His tired thighs trembled as he stretched his legs.

But none of this was as painful as the thoughts that beat at him.

He dried himself languidly. There was some tequila in the icebox. He took a drink of that. Straight. It burned fiercely. He tried another drink, pouring half a glass of water after it. That was better. His spirits rose a little. He

HOT TRAIL

A NOVELETTE BY

CHARLES L. CLIFFORD

finished what was left in the bottle.

There was a girl in town he had meant to see after the game. She'd been there. A second lieutenant had taken his place—just during the game. He was to relieve him of that delightful duty when the dance at the officers' club got under way.

He saw her now, as the tequila mounted to his head. That little El Paso girl with her soft brown eyes and clipped gold hair. Just before the game he said—

"Weeze, I'll give you the cup."

She wouldn't be laughing. But she'd hear the others, around her. There'd be plenty said about him tonight. The whole regiment would be sour. He could see himself walking into the club. There'd be people standing in front of the great open fire: The general, his colonel, his major. Girls with bare arms, eyes alight from the cold and the speed of the game. His teammates, self-conscious, tired, wanting to be away from there, hating the gay music of the post band.

When he came in and went up to Weeze they'd all look at him—slyly. Whispering would start. She'd be frightfully embarrassed, that girl from El Paso. Maybe hate him for the spotlight he brought to bear upon her. Girls like that one didn't have to take up with clowns. And she hadn't known him long enough for him to have a claim on her loyalty. In her heart she was bound to feel like those others. She'd take in the words she heard about him: Grandstand stuff. That's what they'd be saying about him.

The last drink had rung a faint, tingling bell. Bells—they chimed out a pæan of sudden recklessness. You can't drain the last drop of moisture from your body without nature's making certain demands for retribution. And alcohol will not take the place of water.

A sudden eagerness took hold of Crocker. A stubborn, self-defying eagerness. Quickly he dressed in his best civilian clothes. The picture of the club dancing room had faded. He saw, instead, Louie's. Down the hill, across the bridge over the Rio Grande, was Louie's. No fireplace there. No girls with nice eyes. No generals, or colonels, or majors. No fruit punch—no whispering.

Malarkey, his striker, came in as silently as his issue shoes would permit.

"Toby's lame," Malarkey said.

Another time he would have raced, as he was, for the stables. Little Toby, after his three terrific periods. Bandaged, hanging his wide old head over his hot mash. It wasn't Toby's fault the Seventh had won. But he'd been on Toby when that thing had happened.

"To hell with Toby!" he said.

Malarkey's mouth was still open when the telephone rang. His captain walked away from him, fastening the last button of his overcoat. Malarkey did his duty as he saw it.

"It's a lady, sor," he said.

"Tell her I'm not here," Crocker said, and opened and closed the door.

HE REACHED Louie's at that impious time between sunset and the normal dinner hour. The provost guard on the American side of the bridge said nothing about a pass, because once he had been in Crocker's troop and hadn't been put in the mill for hitting a man on the picket line who had used his saddle soap too freely without a proper basis of friendship. He had, in fact, saluted punctiliously and grinned broadly. The Mexicans were above picayunish inspection when a man had the white stripe left by a chin strap down either cheek.

Louie's was a gay place for a failure with money in his pocket. Nobody interfered with fourflushers here. Welcomed them, in fact.

A dance floor made heavy demands on the restricted space. Tables were jammed efficiently against a gaudily painted wall. Colored streamers and light shades gave an air of revelry, loudly maintained by the customers. Waiters raced through the impossible spaces between tables, twisting sidewise like ships conned through tortuous channels. Fat Americans and thin Mexicans, red faced and swarthy, mingled, toasted each other. A loud band shook the smoky air of the place. Jiggling bodies blotted the shining dance floor from the carnival light.

When Crocker entered, a trembling, ghostly spot played from a corner on the almost naked body of a woman, writhing, incongruously isolated, on the empty dance floor. He stood by the entrance, watching. The cloakroom girl called to him. A dim whisper, imperative. He gave her his hat and coat, not caring how the writhing prospered. The lights came on with a wild burst of applause. Louie stood in the middle of the shining floor.

"Hello, Captain," Louie said. "Sure —I can always find you a table . . . Great game you played today."

Crocker laughed. Genuinely. He knew Louie never missed a game.

"You sure, Louie?"

Louie was hurt. This guy didn't think he'd been there. He never missed one, as a matter of fact.

"You made two gools in the first half —I had to get back before it was over. How you come out?"

"I feel wonderful," Crocker said, and he laughed again.

"That's the way to feel," Louie said. "Now you breakin' trainin'!"

He reached for a waiter hurrying by.

"Fix the captain up."

The waiter led him to a leather couch against the wall.

"Tequila."

"Daisy?"

"Bring me a bottle—salt."

"Oh—"

The waiter was impressed. Only the old-timers drank tequila that way. A sip and a touch of salt, balanced on the edge of the hand.

The band beat on. The room grew

hotter, the air thicker with smoke.

There were Mexican officers at the largest and best table in the place. Crocker noticed that Mendoza was there. And there were younger officers—majors and captains, with befrogged blue tunics and gold on the shoulders.

Louie came up and said:

"Mendoza was askin' about you. Wants to meet you. He's a nut on polo. Why don't you go over an' talk to him?"

Crocker looked over at Mendoza. He was very young, and he was a general. He was commandant here at Juarez of the Mexican Federal garrison. Mendoza was a little jingled. He waved, showing his even white teeth.

"*Ven aqui,*" he said.

Crocker got up and walked over to Mendoza's table. People looked up at him. They whispered to each other. They were saying that the man with all the gold lace there was the Mexican general. Girls, who had drunk orange blossoms and tequila daisies, smiled at Mendoza. One of them blew him a kiss. Mendoza looked away from her.

"*Como esta, señor?*" Mendoza said.

"*Bien—y usted?*"

The Mexicans all laughed.

"Sit down. You speak excellent Spanish."

"I've been drinking tequila, but wine isn't bad."

"For officers," Mendoza said.

He poured a new glass for the American.

"I don't see how you stay on those little postage stamp saddles," Mendoza said. He slapped Crocker on the arm. "Maybe you teach us, eh?"

Crocker didn't say anything.

"We saw the game," a major said. "Hot stuff. We want a team over here."

"Yes," Mendoza said, "but we couldn't give you a game at first. We'd have to learn."

"A guy over there hit the ball the wrong way," the major said. "I'll bet they're razzing him tonight."

"Just tough luck," Mendoza said. "I saw it. It would have been a pretty stroke if he'd made it. One of your fellows, eh?"

"Yes—one of my fellows," Crocker said.

"Just one of the breaks of the game," Mendoza said. "Drink up."

"Did you see who hit that ball—the wrong way?" Crocker said.

"No—I just saw it. There was a little blonde girl in the car near us," Mendoza said. "Hot stuff. Brown eyes with white hair. You don't see things like that over here. I couldn't watch eight men and that girl, could I?"

"No," Crocker said.

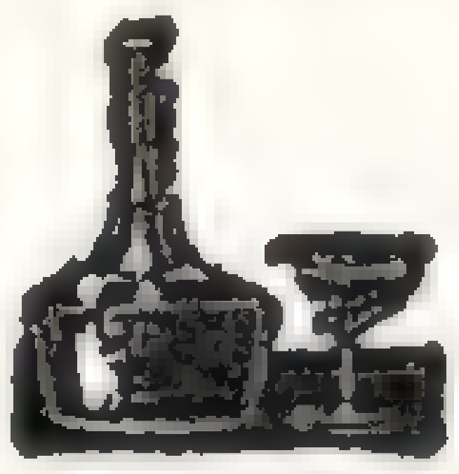
The place was emptying noisily.

"Must be nearly twelve."

"More fun when these gringos go—Oh, excuse me, Captain!"

"That's all right," Crocker said. "I've got to get across before the bridge closes."

"Hell," Mendoza said. "They don't lift it up, do they? You're with me. You can go across any time you want."



THE wine had lifted Mendoza far above the mediocre job of commandant of a garrison. In the colored lights he saw himself leading a conquering army. Riding in showers of roses through the streets of the Mexican capital—drinking in captivating smiles from white haired girls like that little gringa.

As he stared through the colored smoke, part of that vision came to life.

"Look, *amigos!*"

They all looked. Crocker turned in his chair, following their avid eyes. A party of Americans were leaving. They had had seats by the door. One sightseeing drink—touching at the places of carnival like bright birds of passage at dubious flowers. Bright eyed girls, with thin, fur collared wraps, their hair carefully waved, their faces flushed with the unusual adventure. The men with them, tall, broad of back, thin white lines like the paint of a clown across their sun browned faces.

"That's the one," Mendoza said, and straightened in his seat, shaking his head to drive the wine pictures out.

She came swiftly and stood at Crocker's side. There was more than the light color of rouge in her face.

"I didn't think you were a coward," she said. "You might have faced it. You needn't have left me—flat."

She left him standing there, staring after her. Mendoza gulped.

"*Cristo!*" he said.

"Let's get out of here," Crocker said.

They went to Mendoza's quarters near the barracks.

"Funny," Mendoza said. He was sipping wine from his own cellar—pale, German wine. "Fancy—your knowing that little blonde one."

"Finish your drink," Crocker said.

They had a phonograph going. Spanish music on red seal records. Smoke curdled in the big room. The younger officers were laughing, talking above the music, which bored them.

A strange sound broke into the curtained room. Ragged thumps—the muffled scream of a distant siren. Mendoza stirred in his chair. The color in his handsome face washed away as though a soft, white light had caught it in a fugitive gleam. He sat up, his glass spilling German wine on his satiny trousers.

"Firing," he said.

The record finished. The needle grated complainingly.

"Shut it off," a drunken major said.

Crocker stopped the machine. He stood and listened. The noise outside had grown louder. Above the beseeching call of the siren he could distinguish the beat of machine guns. Then louder crashes, close at hand; whistling, eery sounds.

"Seventy-fives," he said.

"Seventy-sevens," the drunken major said, with a ridiculous grin on his face. He was proud that he had told the gringo captain off.

"Get out to your men!" Mendoza roared.

There were bright flashes against the sky—quick throbs of light blotting out the Winter stars. A dull, continuous roar shook against the mountains. The troops of the new revolution beat at the treasure chest of Juarez. Sudden as the Summer lightning they had struck.

"I'm a soldier," Crocker thought dully. "I haven't done much good for myself today. How about it?" he said suddenly to Mendoza.

The young general was buckling on a Luger pistol.

"Stay here," he said. "Maybe the wine will hold out. Plenty of records. I've got to beat it. We'll have breakfast, eh?"

"The hell you say!"

Crocker ran step by step with the young commandant. The C. P. back of the trench line was a stout 'dobe shack. Phones were busy and Mendoza shouted orders to the men at the instruments.

"Send Ibbarra's men to the west trench," he said. . . . "No—keep the reserve back; they're a joke for a thing like this."

"Give me a job," Crocker said. "I'm A.W.O.L. now—let me earn it."

Mendoza laughed.

"That's the talk," he said. "Sanchez—give the polo player a job."

Sanchez led Crocker to the west trench. He was laughing all the time.

"Take those *pelados*," he said, pointing to a huddle of men in a depression by the river. "They fought with Pancho. They love gringos. Take them up to the flank."

"*Adelante*—let's go," Crocker said.

The men laughed.

"*Adelante*," they said.

There was nothing on the flank but desert quietness. Looking over his shoulder, Crocker could see the peaceful lights of El Paso across the river. He could even see the edge of the drive, twisting around the bluff back of the river. Weeze lived there—just at that turn.

"Will you follow a gringo officer?" he said to the men.

“Why not?” they answered.

Then he saw the line of blots against the face of the desert, moving in along the river bank.

He laughed. In civilian clothes he led them, over the farthest trench. They laughed behind him, snapping off the safeties of their rifles.

“NOW,” Mendoza said, lifting his glass of German wine, “I propose a toast.”

The officers in Mendoza’s big room jumped up and cheered. Somebody shut off the phonograph in the middle of “Monterey Blues”. The early morning sun shone benignly through the dusty curtains. Mendoza was very mellow. Sentimental, in fact. As yet he had had no breakfast. And wine on an empty stomach, after a night of fighting, however successful, does strange work.

“I regret,” Mendoza said, looking solemnly at Crocker, “that I have no proper decoration to bestow at this time. Later, perhaps. But for now—”

He bent down elaborately, working the silver foil from the wine bottle. With a slight hiccough he affixed it to the left hand breast pocket of Crocker’s civilian coat with a hair pin he had picked from the table.

“*Salud!*—Play that bugle record.”

The man who had stopped the phonograph obliged. The shrill, tinny notes of the recorded bugles ran through the room. The Mexican officers all stood at attention. Some saluted. Some laughed. Crocker, who had also drunk his wine on an empty stomach, stood foolishly there, looking at Mendoza.

The general shut the music off suddenly.

“Gentlemen—”

They quieted, facing him, most of them holding their wine close to their faces, ready to resume drinking. Don Vicente was at his best this morning.

Mendoza laid his hands on Crocker’s shoulders. There was a fine look in his dark eyes as he gazed straight into those of the American.

“Gentlemen, just now our friend here confessed to me that it was he who hit the ball the wrong way yesterday.”

A wild yell of friendly derision went up from them. They cheered Crocker like a conquering hero.

“*Salud! Salud!*”

The general quieted them. He went on:

“But last night, my friends, he hit it the right way. You all know by now how he led that counter attack on the right—and the panic it caused.”

He paused and pointed a finger at the silver foil, grotesquely pinned to Crocker’s chest. He laughed.

“That, gentlemen—that German decoration is for the polo game. But this—” melodramatically Don Vicente tore from his clean, new tunic a gleaming cross—“this eagle of Mexico is for last night.”

Swiftly he pinned the decoration above the gaudy piece of foil, stepped back and saluted Crocker. Then he held out his hand and gripped that of the American fiercely.

“Brother in arms,” he said softly. There were actually tears in his eyes.

“Lord, what a swell bird,” Crocker thought. But he couldn’t say anything.

“Well—let’s all have a drink,” Mendoza said.

As Crocker left El Paso that night, bound back to the routine of his Border station at Douglas, Arizona, the whole thing seemed like an unusually vivid dream; that was all. And nobody even asked him where he had been that night. Drunk, alone in quarters, they thought—or watching the little flareup across the Line from the Scenic Drive.

II

“WELL, thank the Lord!”

Crocker turned from his desk at squadron headquarters and faced his adjutant. He refolded the thin, typewritten official paper that he had been reading. He placed it carefully back in the long manila envelop marked "secret and confidential".

"From district headquarters?" the adjutant asked hopefully.

After all, he should be told what was in that mysterious letter. Wasn't he the right hand man of this commander of an isolated Border post? Even if he was only a lieutenant and the other a major?

"Clouded with the usual ambiguity," Major Crocker said. "You can and you can't. The usual thing—passing the buck. If you do it right, it was their idea. If you do it wrong, it was your own."

"Yes?" the adjutant asked hopefully.

"Well, it's this 'hot trail' thing we've been hearing about. If you're born with initiative— Have the trumpeter blow officers' call."

The troop officers stood awkwardly in the outer office. Something wrong, probably—officers' call at this time of night. They talked it over, speculating, in the wavy light from the oil lamp hung from the rough board ceiling. The adjutant called the roll by troops. All there. They watched Crocker as he stood in the doorway that led to the inner office.

"I'll only keep you a minute," Crocker said. "This hot trail—you've heard about it. Well, I've confidential orders. No two of us here would agree as to what they mean. I won't read them. I'll give you my translation. We'll go on that."

A tense quiet succeeded the restless scraping of feet. All eyes were fixed expectantly on the major.

"It comes to this," Crocker said quietly. "The next depredation of armed Mexicans across the Line here, and we're authorized to go after them—pursue into Mexico. My instructions become cloudy as to when a trail is hot. We'll call it twenty-four hours. Get it? That goes for a patrol or station. I'm getting word out to them tonight. But, for the love of Pete, don't go gallivanting through that fence with a squad after a regiment. Get word in here at once. Any questions?"

At officers' call there is always one questioner—a professional who wants to advertise his excessive zeal and interest. He started now, but Crocker shut him up.

"All right—that's all."

Outside the headquarters building the troop officers broke into eager talk. At last! Hot trail! Whoopee!

"Get the car up," Crocker said to the adjutant. "And you're coming with me."

They drove in silence along the mountain road that paralleled the International Boundary. The small moon rode high. The air in this altitude was clear and cold. The car rolled smoothly on the hard highway. Scattered along the road, close to the Boundary fence, were the outposts—platoons camped at strategic points, guarding the little ranch settlements or roads that led from the south. Patrols rode between these outpost stations, watching that stout, iron staked, barbed wire fence. Gaps were found in it often, and on the trails nearby the tracks of mule convoys, trucks, the spoor of stolen cattle rustled from the American side.

The American ranchers were up in arms; they cursed the soldiers. And the troopers, riding nights, sniped at, ordered not to fire back, hated the Mexican bandits little more than these snarling ranchers.

Only when the Mexicans were caught in the act on the American side, could the troops take offensive measures. And thus far that hadn't occurred. The Mexicans, carefully informed always as to the exact position of Crocker's men, struck invariably at unsuspected points. It was only when a blood smeared cattleman rode into a station camp, that they knew—and then it was too late. Orders were inflexible. No American troops could cross the Line under any circumstances. And so matters stood on the night of the hot trail order.

The enraging part of it all was the

attitude of the Mexican Federal commander south of the Line. Time and again, Crocker had remonstrated with him, the fence between them, because orders forbade his crossing into Mexico. Herrera had appeared extremely bewildered and hurt at the intimations of this American. His men raid innocent American villages? Steal cattle? Plunder? What an odd idea!

"It is those men to the south—those revolutionaries. Men without honor, who follow the notorious El Tigre. You have heard of him? That outlaw who ravages from Yuma to the coast? My own towns he plunders—and the frontier is wild and long. I would need many times more men than I have to watch all the trails leading from the south. I am with you, believe me, señor, in the hopes of his capture. . . ."

As the drab little Dodge official car swayed along the road, Crocker leaned back and thought of this El Tigre. For months now this rebel chief had held out down there in the mountains. Regular troops of Herrera, that had been sent against him, came back dispersed and unenthusiastic. Many stayed with him. Tales of his eccentricities grew along the Border. He was fast becoming a legendary figure while still at the height of his power, though that power was not yet enough to cope with the money bags of Herrera, who dictated officially to the gambling cities along the Border.

The peons said El Tigre was seven feet tall—that part of him was horse. That he took nothing his men didn't share equally. That no soldier of his was shot down without a formal trial at which he was allowed to tell his story in his own words. And there were no women—no mescal, tequila or pulque. Unbelievable. But El Tigre had made them swear an oath that until the state was in his hands, the men of Herrera ousted and Mexico City reinstated him, no pleasures of the flesh should be theirs.

There was a hill, they said, in the mountain fastnesses. El Tigre had christened it Tepayac, after that chapel hill at Guadalupe Hidalgo. There he duplicated the shrine of the Virgin who had been the patron saint of the Mexicans against the hated Spaniards. And on Her day, December 12th, his warlike band assembled there to pray for the liberation of their beloved state from the people of Herrera.

"Some of that stuff must be true," Crocker thought aloud.

"What say, Major?"

The adjutant stirred, only half awake.

"I was thinking of that El Tigre—those weird stories they tell about him."

"Queer bird, all right. Probably some nutty priest—excommunicated, or driven out of his town for sounding off politically. You know how superstitious the Yaqui is. Most of his men are Indians or the lowest type of peon, they say. Ever heard his real name?"

"The Tiger is all I've ever heard him called. My guess is he's a damned smart *hombre* who pulls the mysterious and religious stuff to hold a following. And the few fights he's had with Herrera's men shows he must have had training. He's no padre, you can bet on that. Mexico's been turning inside out in the last five years. He might be anything from an ex-president down."

IT WAS dawn before the last outpost commander was instructed and the car returned to the headquarters camp. The next three days passed quietly. All along the Line the outposts, alert, eager, hoped for a raid. The pent-up ugliness against Herrera's men was ready to be unleashed at last.

Then came Memorial Day. By request and according to custom, the squadron paraded at a town that possessed a Senator, some miles in from the Border. Outposts were reduced to a minimum. That night the depleted platoon at Rubio was massacred. Five men, all badly wounded, were the only survivors.

The town itself was razed and sacked. The west bound Southern Pacific train was derailed and plundered with great loss of life. But no trail, hot or otherwise, was left. The shocked remnants of men, who told their tales, differed in all the details. The only agreement among them was that the raiding party was large—all mounted Mexicans.

After the raid, they had evidently dispersed to the four winds—ridden back across the Line in small groups or singly. There was little to go on, and no troops handy to follow them.

Crocker talked to Herrera the next day. He rode to the Mexican town and faced Herrera across the fence. Inwardly he was raging. The Mexican was desolated. He spread his hands in a gesture eloquent of his own private horror at the catastrophe.

"El Tigre—El Tigre," he repeated and shrugged.

"El Tigre, hell!" Crocker exploded.

He was white with fury. To hell with this smooth policy he had been warned to adopt with Herrera.

"Herrera," he said, staring straight into the Mexican's eyes, "I'm going to have blood for those men of mine. Hot trail or no, when I find out who is responsible, I'm coming over with a squadron of crazy men behind me. And there won't be any more quarter than my outfit at Rubio got."

The Mexican paled at the madness in those blue eyes; then he burst into an insanity of threats and curses. He gripped the handle of his pistol as he raved at the American.

"You blame me, you gringo pigs! You say I kill your men and steal your mail bags from that train, do you? If you had the guts of a louse, you'd make tracks for the hills where that *pelado* who calls himself Tiger hangs out!"

"If I find that his men did it, I'll run him down if I chase him to the Gulf."

"Bah!" Herrera sneered. "You have heard that I move against him at last to put an end to his impudence. That makes you brave with talk."

"You've tried that before, I've heard."

The words infuriated the Mexican, seemingly far out of proportion to their import. After all, everybody knew that thus far he had made no headway against this bandit of the hills. He let out a stream of filthy abuse.

"I'll show you, gringo!" he stormed. "And if you cross into Mexican territory, I'll fix the rest of those dog eating gringos of yours the way their friends were fixed at Rubio."

Crocker shot his right arm across the top strand of the fence. His fist caught Herrera squarely on the jaw. There was tremendous power behind that blow, for Crocker was a big man, had set himself and had a perfect target. Herrera fell as though struck with an ax. The two officers with him stared stupidly. This was something that had never happened in their varied experience. Before they decided just what to do, Crocker, pistol in hand, mounted the horse he had been holding and rode away at a gallop.

As he walked his sweating horse into the camp he noticed a D.H. plane with Army markings on the dusty drill ground. The adjutant rushed out of the headquarters office to meet him.

"General's here—up in your shack, sir. He's wild."

"Naturally," Crocker said. He dismounted and tossed his reins to an orderly. "Have him cooled out and rubbed down."

A grinning face appeared in the orderly room door.

"I'll be damned!" Crocker said.

A young man in an oil stained leather jacket, tousled red hair topping a dirty, freckled face, followed the grin out the door.

"Long time no see you!" he said.

First lieutenants in the Air Service spoke to majors just like that—colonels, for that matter. Especially if they had pulled slot machine handles and drunk foaming bumpers at the Big Kid's with them over a period of years.

"Heard the news?" Crocker asked gloomily as he pumped Aleck Parsons' big, bony hand.

“Tough. I’m making a patrol to Yuma. Arrived from Selfridge just the other day. General had me drop him here. I’m pushing off. Just stuck around to see what the alkali dust had done to you in the past two years.”

“Take a good look,” Crocker said.

“Say—there’s a swell dump opened up down the Strand. Liquor cheap. What say we get together some weekend—”

“Wait here, Aleck. Got to see the Old Man.”

“Plenty hot by the look of him. Always talking shop, you guys. Why don’t you join the Air Service where you can have some fun? Got anything in the old boot?”

Crocker was halfway up the hill, on top of which was the sheepherder’s shack he called his quarters.

“Maybe,” he called back.

He laughed at the comical look of relief that lighted the flyer’s face.

“Then I’ll wait,” Aleck said. “Tell the Old Man to make it snappy. It’s a dry road to Yuma!”

THE Old Man made it snappy. He was pacing the single room of the little house when Crocker came in. He whirled about, his hands behind his back, regarding the younger officer for a long, dread moment of silence. Crocker had expected fireworks; but the cold eyes under those bushy black brows sent a shiver of real fright down his spine.

“Your dead came in this morning,” the general said.

“It was an awful thing,” Crocker said.

The general took a step closer. Why was he looking at him this way? Crocker wondered. After all, those men were more to him than to any general. Several of them had been in his own old troop. He’d given them recruit drill, in fact.

“I hope you’ll remember their faces—all your life, “the general said hoarsely. “I’ll give you time to turn over. I’ll send another major up in a few days.”

Crocker retreated from those terrible eyes as though a rattlesnake were creeping toward him. He swallowed and moistened his dry lips with his tongue.

“I—I don’t understand, sir.”

The general half turned from him, started for the door. He stopped on the sill and looked back into the room.

“If you’d been on the job and not cavorting about hick towns on parades, maybe you’d understand me better. I’m preparing charges against you now. You’ll get a copy in a few days. Gross neglect of duty—and other things.”

The color drained from Crocker’s face. He took a step toward the door, raised his hands, and dropped them by his sides.

“My God, sir! You can’t do that. I had orders—I talked to Senator Heniman myself on the phone. He said he’d asked District.”

“Bah!” the general hooted. “You’ve had service enough to know that orders don’t come from Senators. A clerk down there talked with him—”

“But the Senator said—”

“Damn the Senator! I’ve made him sweat, too. He phoned Washington. I demanded that they let me send troops in. Proof—that’s all those idiots up there can say.”

He glared at Crocker. Crocker tried to meet his eyes calmly.

“But that’s all beside the point. It doesn’t let you out for grossly neglecting your duty. You’re unfit to hold a commission. You’re a disgrace to your service. Thank God it wasn’t a bigger show that you let your men down on.”

Purple of face, the general stamped out the door and down the hill. Crocker walked beside him in silence because he could not put into words the bitterness and wildness of the humiliation that was boiling in him. And you couldn’t smash a man over sixty in the face. . .

The camp lay stretched below them in the sun. He could hear the men talking in the tents as they passed. Laughs, rough talk. Already they seemed to have forgotten Rubio. While he, after fifteen years of hard and honorable service, was to face a court and be kicked out in disgrace by his brother officers. Not for a crime, but for honoring soldier dead on Memorial Day.

"I'm taking your official car," the general snapped. He pointed toward the plane on the drill ground. "I wouldn't ride in one of those damned contraptions again for another star. Those flying jackanapes ought to have some discipline knocked into them. Shook hell out of me all the way up here."

Crocker ventured a strained question.

"That hot trail order? Is it still in effect, sir?"

"For what it's worth," the general sneered. "No use to you, now. Maybe your relief will make some intelligent use of it."

He got into the car, returning Crocker's salute grudgingly. Crocker stared after the whirl of dust.

"Maybe—and maybe not," he said.

Aleck came up grinning.

"What you and the general looking so merry about?" he said.

"I just told him you and I were going to split a pint of Sunnybrook," Crocker said.

"Let's go!" Aleck said jubilantly. "I got a date in Yuma tonight."

Over the bottle in Crocker's shack he told Aleck the whole story. For once, the flyer's gamin face wore a solemn look.

"Tough, tough," he muttered. He laid a comforting hand on his friend's arm. "Anything I can do? Just say the word, Bill."

Crocker poured himself another drink.

"Nothing," he said, "unless you can show me absolute proof who led the show against Rubio. It's either Herrera or El Tigre. If I had the cold dope and could show it to the general, I'd stand a chance of beating this court. His back's up because the corps area commander is on his own tail. That's easy to see. This thing has just begun. It's up to him to put a stop to it and he's at his wits' end. He's seeing that second star going a-glimmering."

"Let's get this straight, Bill. If you can produce airtight proof that one of them did it, the State Department will act. The Federal government which we recognize will be forced to take satisfactory action, put a new man in Herrera's place who will be good, or clean up El Tigre at their expense?"

Crocker laughed at the unwonted seriousness in Aleck's face.

"I didn't know you had an analytical mind," he said. "If you only had a creative one, now—"

"That's your job," Aleck said. "Shoot me that bottle while you crank it."

CROCKER lighted his pipe and stared at a map on the wall. It was an accurate, inch to the mile topographical picture of his Border sector. It showed also, though in hazier lines, the important trails and configuration of the terrain some miles south of the Line. Aleck, sipping happily, peered over his shoulder. He ran his finger across the map, lining out a chord south of where the Border bulged northward slightly.

"Here's my route," he said idly. "Air's better south here, so I take me a little *paseo* into spickland. Neat, eh? That gets me to my Yuma blonde half an hour earlier."

Crocker swung about. His face was serious.

"You'll be the next one before a court," he said.

"Oh, that's all right. Only the birds see me. Anyway, the K.O. told us it was O.K. long as we didn't land. Fixed it up, I think, with the Mexicans—What's happened to you?"

Crocker had almost knocked the drink from Aleck's hand as he leaped back from the bed over which he had been leaning. A wild light had come into his eyes. He stood in the middle of the room and looked from Aleck to the map.

"What's up?" Aleck asked lugubriously, as he meticulously wiped the liquor from his disreputable leather jacket.

"We are—right now!" Crocker said.

Aleck stared vacantly at his companion's crazy eyes.

"You taken suddenly drunk-o?"

"Aleck, is it really O.K. with your boss if you fly across the fence?"

Aleck pursed his lips thoughtfully.

"Slightly—slightly, big boy. And if he doesn't know it, *and* if there's no forced landing to spread the news—"

Crocker grabbed up a pencil and drew a circle about a rugged slope some thirty miles south of the Line from his camp.

"See that—this bunch of hills?"

"I've only had a couple," Aleck said. "Sure I see them."

"That's where this Tiger bandit hangs out according to the dope," Crocker said.

"Mm-m—let's keep away from there," Aleck said, but a sudden alertness had come into his usually dancing blue eyes.

"Could you stand that blonde up an hour or so, Aleck?"

"I'll be the only war bird in town tonight. I guess I can risk it."

Something in Crocker's face drove the last vestige of facetiousness from Aleck. He asked quietly—

"What's up, Bill?"

Crocker was belting a pistol about him. He filled a canteen from the G. I. bucket in the corner, then reached for his sheeplined coat that hung from a nail over the bunk. At last he turned toward the wondering aviator.

"We're making a reconnaissance," he said. "Let's go."

Aleck looked longingly at the half filled bottle of Sunnybrook. The afternoon sun sent red gleams through it.

"Mind?" he said as he slipped it into his hip pocket. "Those gals up Yuma way love authentic old Bourbon—and I've been cursed since coming into the service with this here *noblesse oblige* racket."

At the headquarters office Crocker told the adjutant that he was leaving camp. That Harmon, the senior captain, was to take command. Then, with Parsons, he walked briskly down to the plane.

"Got a couple of huskies to spin the prop? You know how to put on the 'chute—should have seen the general cussing over it."

Crocker adjusted the 'chute, locking it carefully about his thighs and across his chest.

"This thing all right?" he asked Parsons.

"Just repacked. Don't worry, the old crate's just out of the shop. You'll be back inside of an hour, almost as good as new."

"I wasn't worrying—about that," Crocker said, as he fingered the ring. "Just as well to be sure, though, after a general's been messing with things. Count ten and then pull, eh?"

Aleck pulled his goggles up and turned from the front cockpit to stare at Crocker.

"After all the times I've had you up! If you feel scared," he said reproachfully, "I'll pass the bottle back to your tender care. Think I'd cheat on you, huh? Maybe take an extra sip and crash?"

Surreptitiously, so that the men standing at the prop and the curious troopers gathered about would not see, he passed the bottle back to Crocker.

"You majors give me a pain in the eardrums," he said.

Crocker laughed and stowed the bottle beside him in the back seat.

"You've got it marked on your map?" he asked. "And if the dope's correct, there ought to be a white chapel and long line of stairs in the rock."

Aleck nodded, grinning.

"The Virgin of Guadalupe, bless her!" he said. "Contact!"

The motor roared. Among the jacks of all trades in uniform who stood about were several competent Air Corps mechanics, who were investigating green pastures in the cavalry for a hitch. Expertly they kicked the chocks from under the wheels and clung to the wings of the shuddering plane. The noise of the motor became stunning. Crocker jerked his goggles down close against his eyes, stuffed cotton that Aleck had given him into his ears. A thrill shot through him as the plane bumped, faster, ever faster across the rutted drill ground. The motor was now opened wide. In front of him he could see only Aleck's helmeted head. Not clowning now. All business.

ALECK drove the plane straight up in a steep climb. Crocker looked back and down over his shoulder. Already the camp was a mere orderly row of dots, cut with faint, dark lines. Then he turned and looked ahead. Far below and to the south were mountains, flattened by perspective to innocuous blobs of rock in the sun.

After a bit Aleck looked back, his mouth in a wide grin under his leather mask. Crocker passed the bottle forward. Aleck took a short drink, just to show he was happy and his own man. To please him, Crocker raised the bottle to his lips when he handed it back. Then Crocker wrote on his pad:

> "Ought to be near now. Circle when you spot it."

Aleck nodded and pointed down. In spite of the foreshortening of the ragged hills beneath him, Crocker could make out what appeared to be a circular plateau, set like the bottom of a shallow cup, a little ahead of the ship and some three thousand feet down. The air was so clear that he could make out the rows of huts and the squat, white central building, raised by the labor of El Tigre's men for the worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe . . .

Aleck banked the plane sharply, peering over the side. He jerked his finger downward as a signal that he meant to dive for a closer look.

Crocker felt his heart leap thrillingly upward as the ship dropped like a lead slug. The wind hummed through the wires. He clung to the edge of the cockpit, trying to stare through the rushing air that took his breath away. Aleck pulled out of the dive below the top of the highest mountain that shadowed the plateau. Then calmly he flew in a wide circle inside the wall of the bowl, not a thousand feet up. Crocker, leaning well out, studied the ground below and the running figures of men, crowding out of the huts, pointing upward. He stood up and unfastened his belt. Aleck was paying no attention; he was absorbed with the panorama below.

Crocker leaned forward and dropped his message blank on to the pilot's lap. On the top sheet he had laboriously written what he meant to do. No good telling Aleck before they started; he simply wouldn't have gone over.

As the book dropped on to Parsons' knees, he snapped his head around. Crocker already had one leg over the side of the fuselage. He had spotted his ground. Now was the time before Aleck, realizing what he was up to, shot off over the mountains and spoiled the whole thing.

Nervous as he felt, with the wind tearing him toward that sinister emptiness below, a shadowy smile twisted Crocker's mouth as he stared for a moment into Aleck's starting eyes. He saw the pilot's mouth work, trying to get words to him through the bruising gale of wind, saw his reaching, detaining hand. Then he swung out his other leg, took one quick look downward and dropped.

The savage, scowling faces about him when he landed sent shudders all over Crocker. But when his breath began to come back normally, and he got the goggles off his tired eyes, he noted that mingled with those looks were awe and wonderment. True, rifle muzzles were pointed at him. One man even held on high a villainous looking knife. He had a monopoly of the initiative and courage of the crowd, it seemed. With the sharp blade he cut expertly at the shrouds of the 'chute. Then others, following his example, cheerfully ripped at the billowing silk that was still tugging at the fallen man.

Crocker lay where he had landed. Gingerly he rubbed himself. He had hit pretty hard. Nobody had touched him yet. They were still obsessed with the mutilation of the 'chute.

"There goes three hundred bucks," Crocker said grimly.

The big fellow with the knife stood over him. It was apparent that he was tremendously impressed by this strangely garbed creature who had dropped on wings from the clouds. His voice was respectful as he said:

"Can you walk? *El Jefe* directs that you are brought to him at once."

"Sure," Crocker said and got to his feet. "I came especially to call on the valiant El Tigre."

The man scowled. He said through the side of his mouth:

"I know no such animal. Quickly, now—"

As they crossed the dusty, windswept plain, Crocker stared about him with keen interest. At last he was in the heart of the citadel of the mysterious mountain bandit whom so many weird stories revolved about. He was struck with the perfect job nature had done in fashioning this war nest. Sharp peaked mountains rose precipitously, red rocked ramparts, jealously guarding the flat, circular expanse of the camp. Stout, grass roofed huts stood in orderly array against the shadowing slopes.

The afternoon sun struck brilliantly on the rocky, stone stepped spur that balanced on its point, like a glittering gem, the chapel of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The thing was beautiful with its white pillars and red tiled roof. A labor of infinite love. The materials in it must have cost a small fortune, to say nothing of the terrific job of dragging them into these desert mountains.

A MOUNTAIN stream tore out of a narrow gorge in front of them, whirling and foaming into a shallow bed on one side of the camp. Thick trees massed about it where it dropped from the higher levels. Under these trees was a squat stone hut with a roof of sod. A silken banner whipped from a straight white staff over the house. As it snapped to the mountain breeze Crocker whistled with admiration. Against its green background was embroidered a golden tiger. Writhing from the bared teeth of the animal was a sinuous black snake, its fangs exposed, its forked tongue darting.

"El Tigre?" Crocker exclaimed, and he pointed to the flag.

"*Pronto!*" the man with the machete growled.

He prodded the American in the small of the back with the point of the wicked blade. They entered an outer room, the sentry at the front of the hut snappily saluting the big Mexican. A small fire burned cheerily in the grate, for even at this hour the air was chill in these altitudes. Everything that Crocker had observed in his hurried survey of the encampment had impressed him with an odd sense of approval. No packs of ravenous curs, snapping or slinking about the refuse that usually littered Mexican streets. No slovenly women calling shrilly to half naked brats. No raucous phonographs or tinny pianos bawling their horrible medleys from *cantinas* or cribs. The men he had seen were clean—as clean as the carefully swept streets.

Whoever this El Tigre was, he had discipline of the best. Crocker's spirits rose as he contemplated this fact. For where there is discipline there is a leader with strength, and such a one usually has a well developed sense of logic.

The tall Mexican rapped softly on a closed door. His first look at this El Tigre Crocker felt certain would give him his cue. If what he had heard about him even approximated the facts, he felt that he stood a chance. The man would listen to him, anyway. If, however, he was the cold blooded outlaw Herrera painted him, the best he could hope for was a quick and merciful death against the wall.

It stood to reason that El Tigre would

take no chances on this gringo's giving his show away, as he could reasonably be expected to do if allowed to depart after an unsatisfactory interview. And a man as shrewd as this outlaw had proved himself would guess that an American officer, arriving in such an unorthodox manner, could hardly be on an officially sanctioned mission.

Somehow, Crocker liked the showmanship of El Tigre. The man had probably watched him as he swung down from the plane. But he knew how to impress his men. It was not for the great El Tigre to stand like a kid watching a kite. To have his grandeur dimmed, if even for a moment, by waiting for a messenger to drop in lordly fashion from the sky.

The door to the inner room swung back. A man stood there half across the threshold, watching Crocker. He was dressed in the picturesque style of the irregular Mexican troops—rough boots, with long, sharp roweled spurs, leather breeches, a wide, gay sash, dark blue embroidered shirt, open at the neck. He wore a long, drooping mustache. His eyes were bright and searching under a thick black thatch of carefully brushed hair. Two ornate revolvers hung from the sagging cartridge belt about his hips. He was a handsome man, more like the colored picture post cards than any Mexican Crocker had ever seen in the flesh.

Crocker stood there a little ashamed of himself in the face of this negligent magnificence. He was conscious of the ill fitting leather helmet he wore and the shabby sheepskin lined coat, veteran of many desert hikes. His eyes still smarted from the wind. But he could see well enough to recognize that face before him.

The man looked him full in the eyes. Not a flicker of recognition changed his steady regard. Then with a quick, impatient movement of his hand, he turned to the Mexican guard.

"Has the prisoner been disarmed?"

"Yes, General. One pistol only. He is an officer of the American Army, he says. We have seen the uniform of a major under that coat."

"You may leave him with me, then."

The man started to protest.

"He is a big man, your Excellency—"

A slow smile came into the face of the Tiger.

"Bah," he said. "He is but a man."

The other saluted, aware that he had spoken impertinently, then closed the door carefully behind him.

Swiftly El Tigre stepped forward and grasped the American by the biceps of both arms.

"*Madre de Dios!* How does it feel, *pobrecito,* to dangle above the mountaintops from a handful of silk? It's grand to see you after all these bitter years, *amigo!*"

Mendoza!

"I can't believe it yet," Crocker said. "Lord, what a break for me!"

"Take off your coat—" The general dragged a rough chair solicitously up to the fire. "Sit here."

Eagerly he pulled another chair for himself across the room. He lighted a cigaret. His black eyes were dancing with excitement and happiness.

"I know you will have your pipe. So I won't insult you with these vile cigarets. Light up. Talk to me. By the Virgin, I'm glad to see you!"

Crocker chuckled. He had tossed his coat aside. Now he reached for it. He filled and lighted his pipe. He sat in the big chair by the fire, stretching his long legs.

"Boy—what a load has dropped off my mind!"

El Tigre watched him as a mother would watch a beloved prodigal, amazingly come home. He sighed deeply.

"If only now we had a little drink! Odd, how you Americans always say 'a little drink' and all the time you mean twice as big as we Mexicans dare put down."

They both laughed uproariously, like truant boys on a lark. Crocker jumped up, suddenly remembering. He drove his hand into the cavernous pocket of the short coat. Against the light of the late afternoon sun striking brightly through the windows, triumphantly he held up the half bottle of Sunnybrook.

"*Mira!* It's a tough night for Yuma blondes . . . Say, I thought you'd turned into a Mexican Volstead?"

El Tigre laughed.

"On Christmas day and the day of the Virgin—and when you come to visit me, Don Bill—it is different. Are you going to look at that all night?"

THEN over that half bottle of Bourbon, through a Spartan dinner and late into the night the gringo major and El Tigre talked and planned. Without bitterness Mendoza sketched over the years since they had last met. The varying fortune of political parties and sporadic revolutions had swept him from the bright pinnacle that had been his in the old Juarez days. Then, as a young general, with friends in high places, scion of a powerful family, men said he was headed for the highest honor in the land. He fought on a losing side. Others, who had failed with him, went over to the new *de facto* government. He still held a remnant of his fighting men together; men who believed in him and the ultimate rising of his star.

At last, with a small band, he fled across the desert to the mountains of his native state. His spirit was uncrushed. He would rebuild an army. Seize California Baja from the crooked governor now in control. Defeat the Federal troops under Herrera, who supported the governor.

He knew from friends in Mexico City that the present government of Lower California was not in good odor. There had been many American complaints about the license of the Border gambling cities and consequent abuse of American visitors. And the state was so remote from the capital, whoever controlled it by force of arms could almost defy the Federal authorities. A large force would have to cross the trackless desert to the north, or land at the formidable port of Ensenada if the matter came to an armed showdown. And it would be very costly, to say nothing of the embarrassment internationally to the central government, which was doing its best in precarious circumstances of reorganization, to please the United States.

But Herrera was worried. In the end he knew his flagrant abuse of authority would force action. He was smuggling arms across the Line against the day of retribution. In effect, he was getting his while the getting was good.

"And," added Mendoza ruefully, "giving me the credit for it. He knows I still have powerful friends. And he is afraid of the effect my actions are having on the country. The people want me in control. They want me to govern them. They know I am honest."

Mendoza sent for some of his men and questioned them in front of Crocker. They told their tales simply and departed politely. The final exhibit to clinch his arguments, Don Vicente saved for the last. From his bedroom he dragged an armful of large canvas bags. Across the bold black stripes were the conclusive, telltale words, U. S. Mail.

"Hijacked from Herrera's men. Got them hot just as they came back across the Line from Rubio, just as those men who were there told you."

"Rubio!"

"Yes, Rubio," Mendoza said grimly. "The place I'm supposed to have attacked and massacred your men. And I'm supposed to have dynamited the Southern Pacific train and taken these. A nice job our friend framed up on me so as to stir up your people and our own government. He wanted to discredit me with my own state so that the people would refuse us food and sanctuary."

"But, how did you—"

Mendoza laughed harshly.

"I harass his troops. Even hold up his gambling towns. Yes, I steal his dishonest gains. I've got to feed my men. But this night it was pure luck. I led the party myself. A little raid toward Mexicali. We were too late to save your men. And I thought if we crossed afterward we would be implicated for certain. We ambushed his lot as they came back. Killed many of them. We took these mail sacks. The contents are intact. Look at them. Is that your proof, Don Bill?"

"And how!" Crocker breathed exultantly.

Mendoza smiled a little wistfully.

"Your friend you say comes back tomorrow?"

"I told him I would put a panel out for him if it was O.K. It's a perfect landing field." His face sobered. "Don Vicente, you're—well, I don't know how to put it: hard up as you must be for funds, you've refused to touch this stuff. Lord, there's said to be over a hundred thousand bucks in negotiable stuff in those bags."

Mendoza grinned ruefully.

"A temptation, truly, my friend."

He looked into the fire, silent for a long time. Then he turned his dark, grave eyes toward Crocker.

"You know—your Washington, sometimes I think my mind works a little like his. This is like his Valley Forge, almost—but my men have faith. In these days honest leaders are hard to find in Mexico. And I will not win if I do not win honestly. It is like your game of polo that we both love. To foul sometimes lets you win, especially if the referee does not see it."

He pointed to the mail sacks at his feet.

"There is a case—a foul I am supposed to have committed. I accept the penalty marked against my team. I send them back by you. For if the day comes when I may deliver my native state from this Herrera and his type, I want my hands clean. I want my neighbors in your country to have faith in me. Not to think of me as just another bandit governor who robs today and is gone tomorrow."

Crocker was thoughtful. At last he said:

"My people are strange. They must have technical proof for everything."

"There's your proof," Mendoza said, pointing at the bags. "You take them in the plane tomorrow. It convicts Herrera and wins you pardon."

"I'm afraid it's not that easy," Crocker said. "Sure, they'll be glad enough to get the loot—but the explanation is awkward. It means admitting that I practically ordered a lieutenant to break regulations; that I myself did it deliberately. The railroad will be happy but our Army brain trust up there will think of me simply as a nut who's had a streak of luck. No, Don Vicente, the only thing that would convince our Intelligence officers would be to have those men who were in here tonight come across, make affidavits and hand over the stuff with a note from you."

"How then do you get credit, my friend? Remember, most of this altruism of mine springs from our friendship. I can not swear that a few days more of my staring at those money bags would not weaken my George Washington ideals. You recollect that even he cut down a cherry tree."

Crocker laughed at Mendoza's lugubrious expression.

"I've thought of that," he said "You'll give me a note explaining your own attitude and stating that I got word to you suggesting a conference and closer relations. This was the result. It will steal some of your grandeur, but if I know an American court-martial, it will save my hide."

"I'll do more than that, Don Billy. Leave it to me."

He got up and paced the room. Obviously he was already composing in his head the words he would write. At last he stopped and clapped his hands together.

"It shall be like this: You take the money with you in the plane. The party I shall send must be small. Only tonight news has come in that Herrera's men are gathering for some mysterious deviltry. I have been expecting it. And so I can not too much weaken my garrison; and I am still too unready to risk the offensive. I shall send these men you want at once. By tomorrow night they should be near your camp, for the going is hard and they will have to detour to avoid Herrera's patrols. You meet them alone and conduct them to your camp. Presumably the mail bags came with them. You confront your general. He has his evidence—"

Crocker rose from his seat and held out his hand.

"You're a real sportsman, Don Vicente. It ought to work."

"And if it doesn't," Mendoza said quietly, "I'll come in myself, if I have to ride through that Herrera's whole army."

"You will like hell," Crocker said fervently. "I'd rather take a court than have you run that risk. You wouldn't have a chance."

Mendoza made no reply. He walked out on to the porch. To one of his officers he gave low voiced instructions. When he came back into the room he said to Crocker:

"They'll be on their way in less than half an hour. Now you turn in, *amigo*, for I have a letter to write to your general."

AT NOON the next day the drone of Aleck's motor was heard overhead. With the help of the big Mexican who had captured him, Crocker rigged up a signal panel from some white canvas and spread it conspicuously in the middle of the flat ground beside the camp. Aleck made a perfect landing. He grinned from the cockpit, his idling motor popping so that Crocker could not hear his string of friendly abuse. He whistled when the major indicated the mail sacks. He leaped out then, kicking at the bags with his highly polished boots to see if they were full.

"Train robbing, eh?"

His voice had the usual banter, but his eyes were full of admiration.

"Boy, you've pulled something off this time. But let's go. I don't like the look of that massive friend you've picked up. Who's the troubadour?"

Crocker presented him to Mendoza.

"El Tigre."

Mendoza enjoyed the situation. He grinned.

"Your friend came down here and held us all up with a pistol. Said you'd drop bombs on us if we didn't come clean."

Aleck pointed to the loaded bombracks on the plane.

"I got myself a few pineapples just in case," he said.

The trip back was uneventful. Aleck taxied the plane as close to the headquarters building as possible. When the eager adjutant came running out, Crocker had him bring oat sacks so that the mail bags could be covered from curious eyes. They were then carefully locked in the office safe, the overflow being put under Crocker's bed. Crocker gave Aleck a drink, refused to listen to his night's adventures in Yuma and waved him on his way.

That night his men challenged a party of Mexicans at the fence, and Crocker, who was dressed and anxiously waiting, hurried out to talk to their leader.

He passed through the picket lines, thinking. A little exultantly, because, now that it was all over, he began to realize it was a neat piece of work. A regulation had been broken; but no real harm had been done. If he told the whole yarn to the general he was certain that the Old Man, after a little perfunctory abuse, would drop the charges. After all, what he wanted was to show that his troops were on the job. The affair at Rubio could be explained. The platoon was not taken off guard. They had simply been wiped out by greatly superior forces. That might happen anywhere. The glory of denouncing

Herrera with adequate proof and the return of the huge sum looted from the railroads were real triumphs.

He climbed the rear fence of the corral. The night was intensely dark, lighted only by the desert stars. The Boundary fence gleamed faintly under their light. A group of mounted men bulked grotesquely huge and distorted before him. He could hear their low voices, the gruff tones of his sergeant. He threw his flashlight on the group and recognized several of the Mexicans he had talked with in Mendoza's house the night before.

"Here's the major now," the sergeant said, reining back his horse. "These men wants to talk to you, sir," he said doubtfully to Crocker. "We got them covered."

"They're all right," Crocker said. "Who's your leader?" he asked the Mexicans.

One of them raised his hand to his wide hat.

"I, señor—José Estrada."

The man dismounted politely, handing his reins to a comrade. Crocker's own men whispered, watching the Mexicans suspiciously.

Crocker led Estrada out of earshot of the others.

"I'll have the fence cut," he said. "There is food for you in the barracks. The sergeant will show you where to picket your horses—"

"Señor," the man interrupted, "you are kind. Would it not be possible to conclude this hearing tonight? Without delay?"

"You have ridden far," Crocker said. "It is better for you to remain. I will notify the general in the morning. You have nothing to fear from my men."

The Mexican looked back at his little band. He was silent for a time. He pointed to several led horses with packs humped on their backs.

"We have brought the empty sacks," he said, "and now are ready to take the oath before the *juez*. But we must leave at once."

Crocker, thinking the man timid about crossing the fence in spite of his direct orders from Mendoza, became annoyed. Damn it, couldn't they trust a man who had been willing to drop into their lair in the hills and take the chances he had taken?

"I will try to repay the hospitality you honored me with back there in the hills," he said a little impatiently.

The man said nothing for a moment; just flicked at his thigh with a nervous hand.

"It is not that, señor. A friend of our chief is our friend. It is not that we do not trust. But we must go—at once. As a soldier you can understand that, señor."

"Understand what?" Crocker asked impatiently.

"Today we learn—everything. On our way here we see many men of that Herrera's—cannon, machine guns, many wagons. We slide through them like sand lizards, because men like that are dull. Living in cities makes them blind in the light of the desert sun. But they are many. At last they have gathered their entire might. They will block the passes. Our chief will need every man."

CROCKER knew now what this simple soldier was getting at. Fifty miles he and his companions had ridden in some seventeen hours. Tough going over that rough country. And now, without rest, hot food or fresh horses, they stolidly insisted on making the return ride. And when they got back, what awaited them? Certain death, if their estimate of Herrera's strength were true.

Closely Crocker questioned the man on this point. Several times the Federals had been driven off by inferior forces of El Tigre; hooted at derisively by these Spartans of the hills. But never before had artillery been used, or such a composite organization as Estrada described.

Mendoza's soldier moved his reins impatiently. Suddenly, from under his cloak he drew an envelop and held it out to Crocker.

"Pardon, señor—the writing for your general. I was startled for the moment, thinking it was lost in the fight."

"Fight? You had a fight?"

The man shrugged. He laughed softly.

"A little one, señor. Of our twelve we lose one killed. Another in some manner became separated from us. A weakling, that one, without much stomach for bullets. It is in my mind that he ran to the Herreristas, where the food is better."

"Skulker, eh? Well, let's go. Sergeant, cut a gap through here and leave the wire down. These men will be riding back directly."

The sergeant looked doubtfully at the savage looking band of Mexicans. Cutting the international fence was an awe inspiring gesture outside of his experience. He knew that the only official passages were at Border ports of entry.

"How about them horses, Major?"

Crocker felt sorry for the forlorn little ponies. They had made a gallant march and were tired.

"Estrada," he said to the Mexican leader, "you'll have to leave your horses on your side of the fence. Can't take chances getting them near ours. We've a bunch of new remounts tied right there."

Estrada followed his indicating finger. There on an improvised picket line well back from the corrals and close to the fence were some fifty horses crunching at their night hay.

"*Bueno, Commandante.*"

He ordered two of his men to unsaddle his own horses and to remain with them as guard. The sergeant cut the tough wire of the fence with a powerful pair of wire cutters that were hung on his saddle. Crocker conducted the little party to the headquarters office.

The room was empty. A single oil lamp burned dimly. Crocker dismissed his own sergeant, as he didn't want too much rumor floating about the camp. Estrada he asked to accompany him and to direct that his party wait outside. Then he called the general. He got him at his quarters almost at once. Estrada leaned against a desk, smoking a cigaret, apparently without the slightest interest in the proceedings.

Crocker tried to keep his voice steady as he made his report to the general. In a moment now he would know what his own chances were. By all standards he deserved a slap on the back. If the Old Man had just finished a good dinner, he might tear the charges up on the spot.

He was amazed then when the general said dryly:

"Just a grandstand play, Major. I've already got the inside story."

"What's—what's that, sir?"

The general laughed grimly.

"Been in touch with Herrera by phone. A patrol of his jumped that outfit that brought you the letter and mail sacks. Picked up a prisoner who'll swear that this El Tigre fellow led the raid on Rubio and the railroad personally. The story up there is that he sent it in to pin the blame on Herrera in the hopes that we'd take action—drive him out of the country and leave the field free for him. Cheap at half the price, eh?"

"But, General, I'm sure El Tigre didn't make the attack at Rubio."

"Bah! Herrera's story rings true to me. Hell, the man even offered to let us send troops over after this Tiger. Says he'll cooperate. What Mexican bandit would turn all that money over for the reasons he states? Read me his letter again."

Crocker complied, his voice shaking at the shock the new trend of matters gave him. In the letter, which was couched in polite terms, El Tigre explained in formal language just what he had told Crocker verbally. He had added that he had heard that he was facing charges for not having prevented or punished the depredation on Rubio. That the men he sent as bearers of the money and letter were present at the time he attacked Herrera's command and relieved him of the spoils. That he himself would give evidence if so desired and safe conduct were assured. That he hoped that such an excellent soldier as the Señor Commandante Crocker would not be court-martialed for a matter that the best officer in the world could not have foreseen.

The general grunted as Crocker read that last.

"You got those men of his there now?"

"Yes, sir. Just outside. I meant to take their affidavits."

"Take their arms instead," the general said. "Put them under guard. They're nothing but bandits. I'll be up in the morning. We'll sweat hell out of them. I'm thinking damned seriously of sending a force in there after this Tiger. Only got two or three hundred men, Herrera says."

At the moment this misstatement of Herrera's, which so brazenly belittled El Tigre's fighting force, was dwarfed by the enormity of the crime about to be committed against these faithful followers who had helped him out at such risk.

"General, you can't mean that I'm to hold these Mexicans here under guard when they brought all that money up here at the risk of their lives! Even if your theory about El Tigre—is correct."

Crocker was conscious of a faint creaking of the board floor, but such was his consternation at the moment that he paid it no heed. The sergeant back, probably with news that the meal he had ordered prepared for Mendoza's men was ready. He argued almost violently with the Old Man; but to no effect, except to kindle in him the martinet spark that is in them all. He began to curse, and finally exploded into a direct, official order.

"Hold the wire, sir—I'll see to it."

"Damn it, report back at once! Lock 'em up. Put a strong guard over them."

As the words died over the wire a pistol shot rang out in the quiet night. Others followed. Crocker dropped the receiver and dashed out the door. But he was too late to do any good. The sergeant and two sentries posted nearby on stable guard sat their horses dejectedly as he came up. They held empty pistols and were staring through the gap in the wire boundary fence.

"Them spicks got away with some of them remounts," was all the sergeant said.

But his tone was aggrieved; and it left little doubt as to his private opinion as to who the guilty party was.

The stable sentries looked lugubriously at the major.

"It's all right, Sergeant. My fault. Get back to your posts, you two."

Thoughtfully Crocker returned to the office and made his report to the general. But the typhoon he expected to bring down about his head came not.

"Good Lord, what a chance!" the general said exultantly. "Right where we want him at last. There's your hot trail. Go to it. Bring in that El Tigre bandit and you won't have to worry about picking a defense counsel. I'll get word to Herrera. We've his O.K. as it is, but I'll verify it for form's sake. You can forget that distance clause. Get him if you have—"

Crocker, standing there in the half darkness, felt as if he were struggling out of a nightmare, resisting the hideous words of a specter reaching out to him in troubled sleep. This man was mad, satiated with his own ego. Inflamed with his own superficial estimate of a situation of which he had only the haziest notion. Prompted by convenience and the wily Herrera, he had leaned the way he wished to go. Had fallen into the trap. Things had become too serious now to hold back the truth any longer.

Fiercely Crocker tried to shout into the mouthpiece what had happened between himself and El Tigre. The general raved after the first few words, which in themselves meant nothing.

"Don't stand there bellyaching! If you don't take the field hot on the heels of those bandits, I'll have some tall explaining to do with Corps. Move, now —good night!"

The phone at the other end clicked. Dead finality. Crocker stared about the room, his mind still unable to grasp what had happened, to fashion a continuity of logical thought. The shots had aroused the camp. He could hear the voices of his men, sounds of running feet outside, the shaking of the wooden stairs to the office. It was the adjutant, breathing hard from excitement, three queens and the joker still clutched in his hand.

"Sound 'boots and saddles'—'officers' call . . .' All except the guard—we're going in."

HARD and steady going through the night, three troops and a machine gun platoon. More than three hundred determined men, thinking now of Rubio. No conflicts in their minds as in their leader's. Well armed and trained; well led; hard as nails, they were ready, eager to take on three times their number in any kind of combat the gods decreed. They'd have sung and whistled, if strict orders for silence had not been passed back.

Now as day was breaking, cold, with brittle white lines of light edging the ragged mountains about them, they came down to a dignified walk before the town of Bosque Bonita. Groves of startlingly incongruous trees banked about the flat topped stone and 'dobe houses. Like a cluster of green and red jewels, the little oasis town nestled in the mountains as in the gnarled brown palm of an old man's hand.

The advance guard platoon rode boldly forward, Crocker by the side of the lieutenant, peering through the morning mists. Mexican troops, on outpost duty, rose up, saluted solemnly, waved them on.

Crocker met Herrera face to face at the edge of town. The Mexican sat a huge black stallion and smiled.

"*Buenos dias* . . . I have talked with your general by phone."

Crocker, looking suspiciously about him, saw that the town swarmed with troops. This place, barely ten miles from El Tigre's foothills, was undoubtedly the base of operations.

"You have attacked?"

"No, señor—we await your action. It is not for me to rob you and your gallant men of the rights of reprisal. However—" here Herrera smiled slyly—"if you need assistance . . . "

"I will need no assistance," Crocker said shortly. "We have your permission to proceed?"

"*Seguro, Commandante* . . . Will you halt and rest your men—water?"

"I'll move on."

The squadron rode through the town, Crocker giving the signal to trot. The faces of the Mexican soldiers were not friendly. He understood some of the remarks they made as they shouted at his men. Fortunately the men did not, as a whole, understand the profane and obscene colloquialisms. He brought the command down to a walk as the streets of the town were cleared. Gave route order and lighted his pipe. He rode on thoughtfully.

What was Herrera's game? Herrera outnumbered Crocker's force by at least three to one. He could have barred the way. Did he expect a bloody fight between the American squadron and El Tigre's efficient troops of twice their number? If so, he must know there could be only one result. A beaten American outfit, scattered back into his own lines. That would give him a measure of personal revenge, without jeopardizing his good standing with the American general. And it would weaken El Tigre's position. Immediately upon the defeat of the Americans he could press his own attack against Mendoza, whose tired troops would hardly stomach another battle so soon.

Or did Herrera suspect his own plan? To play upon his friendship with El Tigre? That plan was all worked out.

It was very simple. Merely to explain the situation and ask the Tiger to ride back with him under the safeguard of his troops. Have a quiet talk with his general. That way the whole thing could be straightened out.

Of course, if Mendoza refused . . . He hated to think of that contingency. Between him and this Mexican gentleman outlaw had sprung up one of those instant and inexplicable friendships that sometimes occur between men of different races. Usually between fighting men. It would be tough if El Tigre could not see his way to come. And yet it was a supreme test of friendship.

He was about to ask a man to ride with him through the very heart of his sworn enemies. Herrera was waiting there at Bosque Bonita, a town they must pass through. And, granted that they achieved that delicate passage, what assurance could he give Mendoza that his own general would not immediately incarcerate him as the leader at Rubio?

Truly a hell of a lot to ask of the best of friends.

He left his men at the foot of the trail and rode up alone. Wicked looking sentries peered from behind rocks at the angles of the trail. But no shot was fired, and his request that El Tigre be notified of his presence was swiftly carried out. The word raced up the mountainside; and word to advance him raced promptly down. He met Mendoza halfway up the trail. He told his story briefly, the while Mendoza smoked thoughtfully. There was silence for awhile.

"I'm in a tough spot, Don Vicente. Do you realize that, if you don't agree to this insane proposal of mine, I shall have to attack you?"

Mendoza laughed.

"And you would, too. Damned gallantly. Wouldn't it be a swell fight?"

Crocker laughed at the light in Mendoza's eyes. Actually, the fellow was visualizing an honest battle between two trained forces that would undoubtedly be epic in its grandeur.

"Lord, what a scrap!"

Then the Mexican's face sobered. He threw away his cigaret and laid his hand on Crocker's shoulder.

"Billy, for one moment there I thought only of the fun of the thing. But you, my friend, are in trouble. You do not bring me in and you get yours, eh?"

"That's about it, Vicente."

"I ride with you at once. And those horses my men took—in a few days they will be back. No harm done."

THE men had finished the light breakfast they carried in their saddle bags as Crocker and El Tigre joined them. El Tigre had tarried only long enough to send word back for his horse and to give hurried instructions to his second-in-command, the big Mexican whom Crocker had met on his first trip to the mountain retreat.

The troopers eyed El Tigre as he rode ahead with their major. What in hell was going on? Whom were they to fight? Hell, were they just making a march? Forty miles down and forty miles back just to bring back a guy that slapped their major on the back and laughed all the time.

It was almost noon when the tired column approached Bosque Bonita on the return march. Crocker had suggested to Mendoza that he get into the uniform of one of his men so that they might ride through Herrera's troops without undue comment. He feared that the presence of the famous Tiger, so unconcernedly marching right through the thick of his sworn enemies, might kindle a dangerous spark. But here the Tiger was adamant. His jaw tightened. A quick flame leaped up in his eyes.

"Hide—from that *pelado?* Too much even for friendship to ask, Don Billy."

So, filled with foreboding, Crocker marched his men back over the road they had come. No use trying to avoid the town. It would make almost impossible going for the tired horses; and if Herrera wished to interfere with them, he had only to march his fresh troops to cut them off. No; the best way was the boldest. Always this is true when you are outnumbered, Crocker reflected. His troops had permission of the highest ranking Federal officer in the state to attack and capture El Tigre. They were told that their way would be clear. Well, he had taken El Tigre. How, no matter. That was none of Herrera's business.

The advance guard topped a rise that looked along level ground to the town. A picket sprang to life from a nearby arroyo.

"You may not pass."

Crocker stared at the man. The Mexican sat there on his pony, backed by a squad of ugly looking followers, their rifles advanced.

"I wish to speak with General Herrera. *Pronto!*"

The man rode swiftly toward the town. Mendoza, smiling grimly, dropped his glasses from his eyes.

"They're deployed. We're in a jam, Billy."

"He wouldn't dare. He's talked to our general, I tell you."

El Tigre smiled.

"Your nearest supporting troops are at San Diego. At the earliest they could not be here for almost two days. Who could prove that it was not El Tigre—again."

The Mexican noncom tore back in a cloud of dust. He pulled his pony up, insultingly, almost against the flank of Crocker's mount.

"My general says you come to him alone. You keep your troops as they are on the road."

A sound was heard overhead—like the intermittent purring of a giant cat.

"Plane!" the men muttered. For an instant everybody looked up.

"One of yours," Mendoza said. "Thank God for that."

Crocker's mind was working fast. No radio set. No way of getting word back in time. And Herrera knew that. But this plane . . . Swiftly his eyes traveled over the country behind them. For some distance back the ground was moderately level. Few large rocks, and the brush was stunted and sparse because of the sand and altitude. He turned to his adjutant.

"Panel out for that plane to land. Tell Captain Galwey to supervise it. Direct Captain Harmon to take charge. I'm going into the town."

He put spurs to his horse and galloped for Bosque Bonita. Herrera met him in front of the first *cantina*. The man had been drinking. Instantly Crocker was aware that Herrera had figured out the whole thing. He wasn't smiling now.

"I'll give you half an hour to turn El Tigre over to me," Herrera said.

"I can't do that," Crocker said. He began to fill his pipe.

"Then you won't march north," Herrera said.

"I've my orders. I'm bringing El Tigre back as directed by my commanding general. As agreed upon between him and you."

"Not by me," Herrera sneered. "I gave permission only for you, the catspaw, to bring him out. You see, I have heard what pals you are. One of his renegades told me enough."

"I march north with him," Crocker said quietly. "At once."

"The laws of Mexico have first claim on a murderer. I do not wish to have trouble with your troops—but I protect the sovereignty of my state."

"If you try to prevent me, that means fight," Crocker said. "And that means the end of you, Herrera. We'd have a division over here in a week."

Herrera laughed.

"The end of you, my friend. Your general would not back you up. He only wants this murderer, El Tigre, punished. It would be more diplomatic if justice proceeded from his own people. And with him taken, his bandits back there in the hills will be leaderless. That is all your general wants."

* * *

CROCKER lighted his pipe, trying to appear unshaken by these words. Maybe Herrera was right. His orders had been sketchy and fragmentary. The Mexican general had talked to his own commanding officer later. He realized that if he turned Mendoza over now and marched back with his command intact, very little criticism could be aimed at him. In a downright fight, this far from the Border, his troops would be cut to pieces. Every one would say he was a fool, had used poor judgment. He thought back to the horror of Carrizal, where a little tact would have saved the lives of many good men.

But to turn his friend, the gay, gallant Mendoza, over to this savage! Well he knew the short shrift that would be his. His back to a wall before the dust of the squadron had settled over the little town.

There was one chance. He said:

"You seem to have the argument, General. I'd like to ride back and confer with my officers."

A gleam of suspicion shot into Herrera's dark eyes. He realized how this man hated him. No Mexican, especially one with the dignity of a commanding general, can forget a blow on the jaw.

"Go," he said. He looked at his watch. "The half hour begins now."

Crocker saluted him punctiliously, swung his horse, and rode at a gallop out of town. When he reached his men his senior captain, Harmon, and Mendoza were standing dismounted in the middle of the road, talking with a man in flying clothes. A hundred yards away Crocker recognized that lanky figure. In spite of the tumult of his emotions he burst into a loud laugh. Wouldn't he be bound to be on the spot when trouble was in the air!

Aleck grinned up at him as he came near.

"General sent me for a look-see. Hell of a place to ask a guy to land. 'S'matter? You look sad."

"I am sad," Crocker said.

He led his two friends out of hearing of the curious troopers.

"Can you take off safely from where you came down?"

Aleck looked back to where his plane squatted under the guard of a squad of soldiers.

"I took off with you from that slag heap in Bisbee once, didn't I?"

"You did," Crocker said.

"Then don't ask categorical questions," Aleck said.

"You can take a passenger?"

"Look here," Mendoza said, returning Crocker's thoughtful look. "I know what you're up to—Herrera wants me. Then he'll let you through."

"I'm sending you back in that plane," Crocker said steadily.

The two men looked hard at each other.

"Well, I'm not going," Mendoza said.

"I was ordered down here to bring you back, and you're going back," Crocker said.

"If you turn me over to Herrera, you've done your job—and you know it," Mendoza said.

"You think I'd let you down after what you've done for me?"

"You've got your men to think of," Mendoza said. "You're a soldier, aren't you? If you turn me over, Herrera'll let you march through. It's your duty to bring your command back. You've done your job in turning me over to the properly constituted authorities . . . "

Crocker looked hopelessly from one to the other. Aleck began to laugh.

"Hell," he said, "this bird Herrera's pulling a fast one. He wouldn't dare fire on American troops. Come on, General, let's get going before those cayuses eat the wings off my ship."

Mendoza eased the reins along his horse's neck. He leaned against the animal's shoulder, his right hand idly plucking at the ornate pommel. He said to Crocker:

"Will you or will you not turn me over to Herrera? I won't hold it against you."

"I will not," Crocker said.

"If you don't do it on your own initiative, the virtue of the act is lost," Mendoza said.

"I won't do it. I'm sending you back in the plane. To hell with Herrera. I know how my men feel about Rubio; and I'll see that they know who did it if a shot's fired at us."

"In that case—" said Mendoza.

Before either of the Americans as much as guessed his meaning, he was in the saddle and off like the wind down the road they had come. The American troopers had dismounted, their horses just off the road.

Crocker blew his whistle.

"Stop that man!" he roared.

Orderly excitement rustled down the line. A rifle cracked. Crocker, mounted and galloping along the column, yelled to the men to aim at the horse. Mendoza, riding hard, lying along his horse's neck, was almost beyond the cover of a sharp drop in the road, when his horse plunged to his knees and rolled over in a cloud of dust. But he was unhurt. He had merely stepped in a gopher hole. He struggled up, riderless, and galloped madly back up the trail. Mendoza was dazed from the fall but uninjured.

"Well, I did my best for you," he said, grinning wryly up at the white faced Crocker.

"You nut," Crocker said.

He dismounted and put his arms about Don Vicente's shoulder. The fall had occurred near the plane. He propelled the still shaky Mexican toward it.

"In with you . . . Harmon, form the squadron in mass. I want to talk to the men. You, Aleck, deliver this lunatic to headquarters. You can tell the general that I'm marching north per orders. If you've got any pals up there looking for a date, you might fly back with them."

Aleck looked solemnly out from under the goggles cocked on his brow.

"I'd like to lead a squadron back here and drop a few Easter eggs around. But there's only two ships working the patrol these economic days. Not a chance."

"You get going."

The motor roared. Aleck and Mendoza waved through the red haze of dust. The plane stumbled crazily over the uneven ground. The soldiers, holding their horses by the roadside, began to yell encouragement.

"Shut those men up," Crocker growled to the adjutant.

THEY mounted, formed columns, rode into the formation, their eyes stealing sidewise, watching their commander's face. Crocker sat quietly on his horse, watching the plane sweep up, almost invisible against the drab wall of mountains that shut in the town. Aleck circled it above them, banking sharply. They could see him leaning far out, waving down to them. The men craned their necks to look. Then, like a homing pigeon, the ship straightened as it gained altitude and droned away through the higher passes of the mountains to the north. In less than thirty seconds the sound of its motor died abruptly as it dropped over the nearest crest and out of sight.

"Mexican messenger, sir!"

The man sat his horse arrogantly—the same one who had earlier barred the way with his picket.

"My general—he is there."

The man pointed down the road. Halfway to the town Herrera sat his horse between two of his officers. Crocker trotted to meet him. Gone was all vestige of politeness now from the Mexican general's swarthy face. He shook a violent finger at the sky.

"El Tigre!"

His voice was hoarse with suppressed fury.

"Yes," Crocker said. "I have carried out my orders. He will be across the Line—" Crocker raised his wrist coolly and consulted his watch—"in just about fifteen minutes. There he will consult with my general who will be waiting at my camp."

All control left Herrera. And the liquor he had drunk, the bragging he had done before his officers, swept the last trace of balance from his savage brain. Wildly he reached for his pistol, but Crocker beat him to it.

"Ride back, Herrera," he said.

He kept the pistol pointed at the Mexican leader, but his eyes darted warning at his bodyguard.

"Go back," he said to them. "My men would rip you to pieces before you could fire a shot."

They looked over his shoulder and saw that close packed, business-like body of khaki clad men. Well they knew what might happen to them before they reached the cover of the town, some hundreds of yards behind them. Sullenly they looked at their leader. His eyes were darting from his head; his face, black with anger, was twisting about his set teeth.

As one man they spun their mounts and tore back to the town.

Crocker holstered his pistol. He stared for a moment after them. Then quietly he rode back to his men.

"That spills the beans all right," he said.

Scattered shots were coming already from the town. He called to his captains, whose eager eyes questioned him as he came up.

"A and B Troops, as foragers, right and left of the road here! C Troop, reserve—keep 'em mounted back of the rise there, Harmon."

He was conscious of the exultant gleam in the eyes of the troopers who had heard.

"Just a minute—"

His eyes held the three captains, each straining to be back with his command.

"Pass the word to your men that Herrera's outfit in the town there pulled that stunt at Rubio . . . You, Breezy, get your guns back there on that ridge!"

The youngster in command of the machine gun platoon shook with excitement. He was just from the Point. He was wild with this prospect of unexpected action.

"Get going."

"Yes, sir. Er—thank you, sir—"

Crocker laughed. His heart was heavy. He was doing wrong to send that kid into such a mess as this was bound to be.

"My God," the adjutant breathed. "We won't stand a chance, Major."

"What the hell of it?" Crocker said savagely. "Those guys at Rubio didn't, did they?"

Crocker rode up to the captain of the reserve troop.

"I'm going with the assault echelon," he said quietly. "Bring your outfit on deployed, mind you—well back. Cover those guns, and—" he looked steadily into the officer's face—"cover us. Watch yourself now. You're second-in-command. If we don't make it, get 'em back there in the hills and hold on. Parsons'll have troops down here by tomorrow."

Harmon looked at him a little bewildered. There was a strange whiteness about his lips.

"You ought to be back here with the reserve, Major."

"Don't tell me my job," Crocker said, and he rode back to the fanning line at a gallop.

Bullets were snapping overhead now. There came the whine of a shell—more shells. A soldier laughed.

"Just like the Meuse-Argonne, guys—only different."

A trooper, riding up to the line directly in front of Crocker, dropped from his saddle like a bag of meal. His mount snorted and shied violently from him, dragging him a way, one foot in the stirrup. The horse kicked the man away from him and raced up beside his troop mates. Blood trickled from the still figure. Other horses kicked up clouds of dust into the empty face.

"They started it—damn their souls!" Crocker said aloud; and he thought, "It's madness if the bluff doesn't work."

The line moved forward at a trot, the eyes of the men watching their officers.

"Raise pistol!"

The bright noon sun gleamed from the polished barrels. The long, thin line took up a canter; the scouts rushed forward over the rough ground at a gallop, looking toward the center to keep semblance of a dress parade. Crocker, riding in front with his adjutant, laughed.

Horses were going down now. Above the rushing tide of hoofs that beat like muffled drums on the hard earth, could be heard a higher, quicker beat.

"Guns going—give 'em hell, young Breezy."

Herrera in his fury had sent a mounted force to meet the oncoming Americans. He would have done well to keep them in the safety of his walls where their fire would have been useful and not masked his own. They were imperfectly deployed when the Yankee line struck them. The blaze from a hundred pistols swept them away.

THE shell fire was high, the bursts far beyond the slowly moving reserve. It wasn't until the American line was literally at the walls of the town that casualties became serious. Here Herrera had thrown up hasty barricades. A fierce crossfire came from the roofs and windows of the houses. Crocker, directing a brazen attempt of some dozen dismounted men to tear away the barricade across the street, saw that unless he got his men under cover soon they would be shot down like targets. Breezy's guns were silent, being masked by his own troops.

Before moving out, Crocker had studied the surrounding terrain carefully, and now saw his only chance. He had made his gesture and his soul was appeased. His men had had their fun. He had noted to the right of the town a steep ravine. There was cover there, and a way back. Swiftly the word was passed. By groups and at the gallop the men rode along the edge of the town and into the ravine. Almost before the Mexicans realized what they were up to and had time to organize a counter-attack, they were gone. Perfectly Breezy's guns covered the withdrawal; and Harmon, seeing what was up, helped out with dismounted action.

There might have been a chance; Crocker justified himself as he supervised the rapid reorganization in the arroyo. Herrera might have been bluffing; he'd done a mad thing in opening fire on peaceful American troops. It even had occurred to Crocker that, strong as the Mexican force was, the suddenness and determination of his attack might have caught the Herreristas improperly disposed for airtight defense.

He was wrong in both suppositions. Herrera had figured his man out. Had realized the recklessness of this gringo who had had the temerity to strike him across the Boundary fence in the very teeth of his armed escort. He had been adequately prepared for just what had happened. And now . . .

Crocker stared gloomily at the disarray before him. Officers shouted sharply, profanely. Sergeants cursed, the bitterness of defeat in their hoarse voices. Men were lolling across their saddles, holding hands tightly against their bodies. Horses were panting, their eyes frenzied, their tired haunches trembling.

"Get them back up there under cover of C Troop. Keep clear of that machine gun fire . . ."

The voices of their officers steadied the men. Squads, platoons and troops straightened out. Long hours of training counted now. Before the Mexican counter-attack got well under way, Crocker had his assault troops cantering in orderly formation back up the ravine. He selected the first practicable defensive position. This was a continuation of the ridge where the machine guns were emplaced. Slowly, by platoons, the reserve troop drew back to this line. As they worked to the new position, they fired stubbornly upon the Mexican troops now swarming in straggling lines from the town.

Crocker dismounted his command—all save a small mounted reserve—and sent the led horses quickly to the rear under cover. While the defensive line was being organized and the combat patrols were moving out to the flanks, he studied the Mexican formations carefully through his glasses.

Herrera was making his first mistake. To begin with, he was rushing his troops into the counter-offensive piecemeal. His eagerness for a quick kill was no doubt responsible for that. But his greatest folly was that his assaulting line was coming on dismounted. True, he had sent strong mounted patrols to the flanks. But with his preponderance of troops and ideal position for affording adequate covering fire, a well coordinated mounted attack would have been practically irresistible against that hastily formed line.

Some eight hundred yards intervened between the two forces. Sufficient space to allow the Americans to get their ranges and designate targets methodically before coming under a well directed fire. And they were vastly better shots than the men of Herrera. They opened at five hundred yards. The dry dirt threw up a thin dust haze in front of the muzzles. The machine guns drummed viciously in quick, short bursts. The Mexican shrapnel, sporadic and inaccurate, burst innocuously against the blue sky. Their rifle fire, as they stopped and knelt to shoot, was wild.

When the first blast of the American fire hit them, they reeled back as though struck by a great, lashing whip that swung from one flank to the other. They dropped flat on their faces, crawling frantically behind mesquite, soapweed stumps, stones that wouldn't have hidden a terrier. Crocker could see their officers through his glasses kicking them into firing positions. This was different from firing behind a thick 'dobe wall.

But their line built up, thickened by more and more reserves. Anxiously Crocker noted a large body of men issue from the town and slide quickly into the ravine that had been his own salvation.

"They'll be in on our flanks soon," he thought, and he directed the reserve troop to meet the new menace and his adjutant to select a new position in the rear to which to retire.

Herrera's men came on doggedly. They now had twice as many rifles as the Americans. And they were all going. Stubbornly, Crocker held on as long as he dared. Soon Herrera would see his error and have mounted troops charging his flank. He gave the order for the retirement to the new position, troop covering troop—platoon by platoon. The movement put new heart into the attackers. Wild yells came to them across the dusty plain. The noonday heat was intense. His men cursed as they raced for their horses, mounted swiftly and tore back under a hail of bullets.

A new worry came to Crocker. Ammunition. The pack animals were being stripped now. That in the light troop wagons had already been distributed. His reserves were all in action. The situation was fast becoming desperate. If he could hold out until dark—but by that time, long before, his ammunition would be gone. Herrera's superior force would have overlapped his flanks. It would be surrender or . . .

CROCKER crouched behind a soapweed stump, staring over the flattened bodies of his men as these thoughts went through his head. He had got them into this, more through his own damned vanity than anything else. It was up to him to get them out. Wild plans shot through his brain, crazy attempts to find a desperate solution of the mess he was in. He thought of giving the order to mount, then making one frantic dash with his men behind him through the town. That way, while the ammunition lasted, he might fight a delaying action toward the Border. But the ammunition would not last.

Or he might give the order for each man to ride for his life, disperse the whole command like a covey of quail. Some would get through; many, possibly. But he shrank from that. It was a complete confession of failure, a repudiation of command. His pride alone would prevent that.

What, then?

He stood up, unmindful of the bullets tearing about him into the hard ground. He looked back. Peacefully, the high sun shone down on the slopes of the foothills and the winding trail over which he had come. Back there was sanctuary—the Tiger's nest in the hills. It was a desperate plan; but it might work. Mendoza's big lieutenant would be in command. He knew of the friendship between his chief and this gringo. Might he not let them pass into the blessed haven of those hills? Even if he did so, it would be defeat. But here it would be massacre. And he owed his men something.

Crocker turned about to give the order. He gave one final look along his line. His left rested some hundred yards from the road. His right dipped over into the ravine up which he had come earlier in the day. His reserve troop had extended that right, and were now the most heavily pressed. It was going to be tough to get those men's noses out of the dirt. But if he moved now, they might just make it. Some of the guns would have to be sacrificed—their young overseer already had been. Just a minute before he had heard what had happened to Breezy . . .

A trumpeter rode up, brazenly defying the bullets whining all about him. His horse dripped blood from a wound in the muzzle. It shook its head, mystified, trying to drive that wet, hot annoyance from its inflated nostrils. The messenger's face was masked with red dust. His eyes distended with the import of his news. At first he couldn't get the words from his mouth, he panted so.

"C-comin' up that ravine, sir—hunerts of them."

"Hundreds, hell!" Crocker said. He began to curse the man slowly, coldly. "Did you see them yourself?"

"Seen hunerts of them. Cap'n says they's formin' other side the draw. It ain't steep there. They's mounted—hunerts of them."

There could be no doubt after one look at the man's face. Crocker knew him, and he was a steady soldier. Not a chance now. It would be panic if men left the line as a charge was about to be launched. Stick to the rifles and die with them in their hands.

He said calmly to the trumpeter:

"Take my compliments to your captain; tell him to hold his position. The machine guns will support him."

"Yes, sir."

The man saluted mechanically. He rode off at the gallop, his head along the horse's neck. Crocker sent word to the guns.

The Mexican frontal attack now contented itself with holding its position, which was about five hundred yards away. They knew what was coming. Why risk unnecessary losses by working closer to those deadly Yankee rifles, when their gallant horsemen would soon sweep the gringos on to their bayonets like gophers before a prairie fire?

Crocker swung his glasses toward his threatened flank. Beyond the upper end of the draw he saw Herrera's maneuvering mass plainly. The ground they had chosen to charge over was fairly free of obstacles. It sloped gently from the near hills toward the right of the American line. The intervening arroyo here was a mere dip in the ground. If only he could have drawn his line back sooner—for back of the right the terrain was broken by small hills that would have given cover and been difficult to negotiate mounted by Herrera's charging line.

Above the sound of the rifles a new note broke. He looked up. A plane circled, high in the sky, a moving toy against the afternoon sun. Doubtless Aleck, for the Mexicans had none. He'd have done his job, flown Mendoza to San Diego and now was back to view the fun. Well, the fun was almost over.

The plane dived. It roared in great circles over the field. The Mexican attack was organizing with the eagerness of certain success. Still out of effective range, the troops were fanning out into a properly deployed line of foragers. Nothing could cheat them of victory now. No piecemeal work. They were setting themselves so that the charging horses would strike at just the right angle—all on the line.

A messenger, bent double, ran up to Crocker. In his extended hand was a long, streamer-like affair.

"Dropped from the plane, sir."

Sweat from his shaking hands smeared the indelible ink into purple blots as Crocker tore at the message form. In spite of his present agony, a grin twisted his face as he read.

> Give them hell, Custer. Governor of North Carolina and South ditto split a pint and ironed out all the wrinkles. Beating it with Tiger man to get his troops up reenforce you.
>
> —ALECK

Crocker threw the message from him and laughed. Ten miles—two hours. Not a chance. Now he saw what he should have done if his pride had not got the better of him. Mendoza had realized all along that Herrera wasn't bluffing. Had attempted the big play of riding back for his troops while there was still time. Probably when they took off he had tried to turn Aleck back. That's what they should have done. Aleck's kind of stuff. But loyal old Aleck—he had realized that an old friendship would have ended if he had disobeyed that direct order to fly north.

A BULLET ripped the sleeve of Crocker's shirt. He shook his arm angrily, looked up for the plane. A few bombs might help. The ship had soared up. Hell, were they going off—leaving him? They must have observed that forming flank attack, must have realized the hopelessness of his plight. There were no machine guns mounted on the old observation plane. They would have been the stuff—to rake that mass of horses. But Aleck had bombs, certainly. He had mentioned them.

The plane banked steeply, straightened, dived, then flattened out as it arrived over the Mexican mounted force. The motor roared above the thudding of the rifles. Crocker could see the faint gleam of the sun on the falling bombs. Pitifully few, those bombs—small, hardly bigger than grenades. The best they could do.

Sharp, vicious explosions—successive spurts of dust. The men on the firing line lifted their faces from their hot rifles and screamed out encouragement.

Some of Herrera's horses went down. For a moment there was confusion in the deploying line. Crocker could see terrified men spurring their mounts away from this unheard of terror. But the bombs were gone. Quickly the Mexican officers got that over to their men. The dismounted line lifted their rifles toward the sky and poured a stream of bullets at the plane.

Aleck zoomed. No sense in being shot down by rifle fire. The plane banked back, rose. Crocker watched it grimly. It was no further use here. And if Mendoza could get his troops up fast, they would still be in time to take advantage of Herrera's disorganization after victory. Revenge, anyway; even if it was to be posthumous.

Crocker had turned from watching the plane to estimate the progress of the Mexican flank movement. He heard his men calling above the sound of the firing. A messenger, crouching beside him, tugged at his arm.

"They got 'em, Major—the plane!"

As he followed the man's pointing finger he saw the plane rocking crazily along the rough ground to the rear. Even uninjured, no pilot in the world could have landed a ship on that broken ground. Up went the tail. The plane crashed over, sending up a cloud of dust. As he stared, aghast, a mounted man tore up. Blood was smeared across his face. It dripped from his chin on to the front of his wet shirt.

"Right combat patrol, sir. Troops comin' up back of us. They got us in the rear."

The man pointed back over his shoulder toward the trail.

"Must have sunk 'em outa the other side of town to get round behind us."

"Get to the guns," Crocker said harshly. "Tell the sergeant. Direct him to put two guns on them when they come over the ridge."

The man rode away. His horse slowed, came down to a lurchy walk, sank to the ground in a flutter of dust. The messenger, too, had been hit. He rolled away from the horse and lay still on his face.

"Hell, what's the difference? A few bursts is all they'd have got in."

Crocker looked back at the wreckage of the plane. The dust had settled about it. There was no sign of its occupants. Poor Aleck—after a year on the Western Front to be shot out of the sky by a stray Mexican bullet.

The Mexican mounted attack was now coming on. As yet the horses were at a trot. Bursts from his own machine guns were kicking up dots and dashes of dust in front of them. Here and there along the thin line a horse fell. They were still too distant for effective rifle fire, but Crocker sent the word along the line to switch on to them at the last. They'd get a bellyful before they rode over these gringos.

The adjutant crawled to Crocker's side. He was badly wounded in the leg. He had twisted a first aid bandage tightly about the wound. It was dark with blood. His face was screwed up with pain.

"There they are," he said, pointing to the rear.

A thin cloud of dust arose above the low hillocks there. So they were coming up on the right to mop up after the first assaulting wave rode through?

"Smart Herrera," Crocker said. "Didn't think he had it in him."

"Here they come!"

"The guns will see them—they won't all get here."

The new troops rode out of their cover at a gallop. Their direction was almost at right angles to the now approaching flank attack.

"What a spot to be in, if they were our own troops," Crocker said grimly.

"They deploy like veterans," the adjutant said crisply. "Look at that line form!"

"Waving banners and all," Crocker said, and he laughed harshly. "They'll let the others pass them and wheel in behind as a second wave. Beautiful maneuver under fire—we might as well enjoy it while we can."

"That flag—" the adjutant said. "Not Mexican."

Crocker raised his glasses, moved them about until he picked up the flag in the field. For a moment he stared, unbelieving.

"Shall I have the horse holders open on them? We won't need horses now. They'll be coming in right by our flanks—What's the matter?"

Crocker had lurched heavily against the lieutenant. His face had gone suddenly very white. His hand reached jerkily along his side.

"Tie it up—here in the ribs. Smashed to hell."

He slid over, his teeth clenched, his breath coming in short, agonized gasps.

A wild roar came up from the men on the line. Trying to rise, Crocker gestured weakly with his hand.

"Look—look, you ass! Lift me up. I wouldn't miss this show for—"

"Stay still!"

THE adjutant raised him, holding the compress against his side. A wild sight met their eyes. Tearing straight down on the flank attack came a long, purposeful line. Pistols gleamed in the sun over their heads. Their necks stretched, the horses raced at top speed. Out in front ran a huge black horse. The sun flashed from its rich trappings. Almost at his flank was a strapping white horse, rushing on as though in sight of the finish line of the Derby. And above him, standing out in the wind of flight so that all could see, was a green flag bearing a gleaming golden tiger.

"Lord, they're riding into each other!"

"It's Mendoza, you ass! Get word to the guns and along the line. These crazy men will be giving it to them in the flank in another minute."

The adjutant got the warning out through headquarters messengers, then turned and swung his glasses eagerly. Back to his stump, Crocker focused his own glasses with shaking hands.

"For the love of Pete! Do you see what I do?"

"They're going to get them squarely in flank. Whew! What a break for us."

"That guy waving the flag—take a look at that."

"He's— Good Lord! Got a helmet and goggles on him. Why—"

"He *would* be there."

Crocker almost choked with weak laughter. He held the wet bandage tightly under his left arm to keep it from shaking away from the wound.

"They jumped out of the plane unhurt. You know that guy, Aleck. Saw Mendoza's men from the air. Must have been just back of the hill. Joined them back there, that's all. Thank God we're seeing at last what we've read about for years—a cavalry charge."

But few of Herrera's men were in line when the shock came. On their handy ponies they had wheeled from that thundering menace. They too had seen that fantastic banner. In five minutes from the time Mendoza's men rode on to the field, Herrera was in full flight, his force disorganized. It was all over.

"Blow cease firing," Crocker said wearily.

A terrible weakness came over him. He sank to the ground and lay on his back, looking up at the blue sky. Harmon, dirty and disheveled, but miraculously unwounded, bent over him.

"Take charge," Crocker said. "Get them into the town—get the wounded in first. We'll take—the others back with us. March in the morning."

Some horses came up. Men dismounted. The sun was blotted out by a group that formed about Crocker. Mendoza leaned over. His face was dark with concern. He knelt quickly.

"I'm O.K," Crocker said, grinning up at him.

"Thank God for that," Mendoza said. "And everything's all right on the other side. Your general said you were to attack Herrera at the slightest excuse. Hot headed old boy, that one."

"Who's your friend?" Crocker asked.

Aleck, his face a mask of dirt and grease, stood grinning foolishly, his goggles pushed up on his forehead. He had brought down five German planes not many years before, but that was a mere prank in the sky to the thrill he had just experienced. He nudged Mendoza.

"Tell him—tell him just who I am," he begged pridefully.

Mendoza laughed and slapped him on the back. He pushed Aleck out for all to see.

"Don Billy, you observe the hero of the battle—the man who captured Herrera single handed."

Aleck grinned sheepishly.

"I couldn't help it if that old milk horse wouldn't stop. Outside of a merry-go-round, it was my first attempt."

"But how in the world did your fellows get here in the nick of time, Vicente?"

Proudly the Mexican laid his hand on the streaming neck of his black horse. Then he pointed back to the hills.

"Because your men are such rotten

shots and El Negro here appreciates a good home," Mendoza said, smiling.

"Somehow that doesn't make sense," Crocker said, trying to grin at Mendoza.

Aleck, keeping a respectful distance from the heels of El Negro, stroked his wet muzzle timidly.

"He's a home loving horse," he said. "He made it in nothing flat. You've seen those horses in vaudeville—tell their age and all the dirt about their masters? All the general's lieutenant needed was that empty saddle and the look in his eye. I suppose if it had been you, you'd have had to have a field message and—"

"If you don't shut up, I'll put you in arrest for busting up Government property," Crocker groaned. "Now somebody give me a leg. I'm riding that black into town."

"Right," Mendoza said, slipping an arm under Crocker. "And you're riding him from now on so you won't forget today."

"Fat chance!" Aleck said. "Especially me, if there's a drink of tequila left in the conquered city."

Shashlyk By BORIS N. KAMYSHANSKY

YOU can have *shashlyk* in any Oriental restaurant—squares of mutton roasted on spits and then boiled in fat with onion, garlic and pepper. But you have to eat *shashlyk* made in the field before you know its real taste and charm.

Once I had to spend a night in a Kavkaska village, and my host, a Cossack captain in reserve, invited me to go with him on a horse patrol. Young horses are sent to that common pasture east of Kavkaska in the middle of the Summer. The drought does not affect that watershed between the bend of the Kuban River and the headwaters of the Eya. Herds of fifty thousand horses wander to and fro. Every twelve hours a patrol makes a round of the herders' posts.

After nightfall, on hook-nosed Karahakh horses with cushioned Cossack saddles, the captain, two Cossack riders and I started on our patrol. After midnight we reached the central guard post.

Two covered wagons stood near a blazing fire, by the light of which we could see the preparations for our supper. An old Cossack, surrounded by barking dogs, laid two hind legs of mutton on a clean wooden board. With his dagger he cut the meat in long strips, then hacked the strips into thin squares, which he sprinkled with coarse salt.

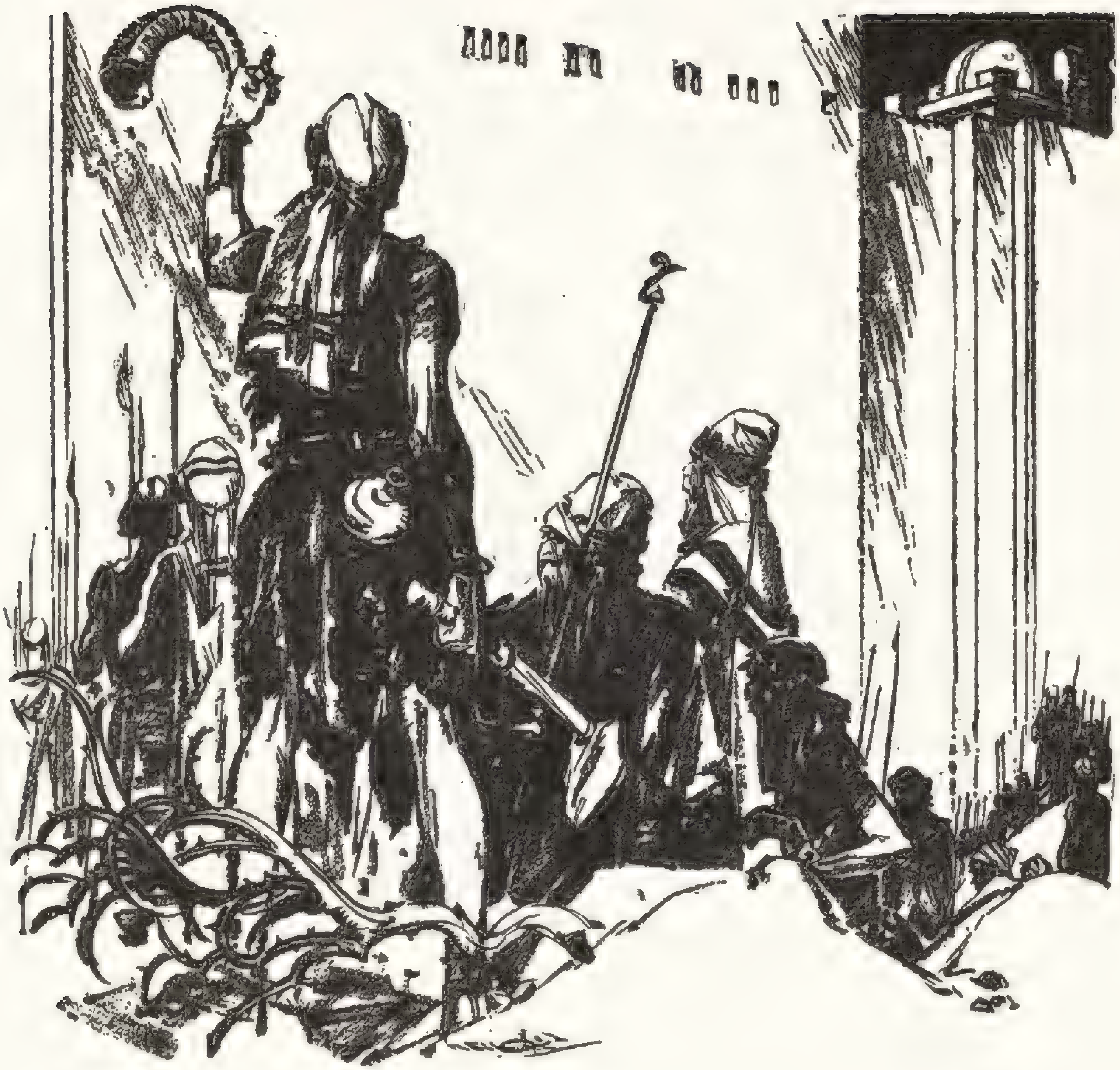
A boy sharpened some thorn sticks; another raked glowing coals from the bonfire into a shallow trench nearby. Several riders meanwhile came up, dismounted and sat beside us. The boys laid out before each of us a bowl, a mug and a three-pronged fork; and an enormous earthenware bottle of wine for every pair of us. With hungry eyes we watched the cook and his helpers thread the thin squares of meat on thorn sticks and lay them in a row across the trench of glowing coals.

One boy raked fresh coals from the blazing fire into one end of the trench; another raked away the cinders from the other end. Odor of roasting meat, boiling fat and burned salt and thornwood floated toward us.

At last the cook said, "Ready!"

We got in line with our bowls. Each received four sticks in his bowl and returned to his place. The boys handed out white, spongy loaves. With daggers for knives we began our feast of aromatic *shashlyk* and red wine.

In an hour we mounted again, thanked our hosts and went on to cover the second half of the patrol.



WALLS

By JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE

SLOWLY, because Louisiana sun is hot, young Jones climbed from the bottom step, awash in green Gulf water, toward a fringe of bushes, innocent against the sky. Days spent in a genteel brokerage office had not taught Jones to expect the unusual, even on Fort Livingston, ruined, now, for fifty years.

Beyond the bushes he nearly stumbled over two men who sat on the outer wall with a bottle between them. Jones did not know that the unusual should be regarded from a safe distance. He stopped short to look—and remained to stare. Never—even in the Louisiana swamps which are full of strange men—had been people like these. The broad shouldered one, with the shining black eyes and a beard which curled down his deep chest in black rings, had one huge hand over the bottle. The other, a slighter man, was plainly not a negro. Yet his skin was the color of chocolate; smooth and tight drawn; more like tanned leather than human flesh covering. His eyes, though only a few feet away, appeared to be looking across incalculable distance.

The bottle itself had earth mold on it, and no label. Yet, as Jones looked, something about the amber sparkle of the liquid brought a gleam to his eye. It seemed to speak to him of the past, and Jones was an authority on liquid antiques. The man with the beard chuckled.

"Set down, mate," he said. "This here's enough for five and the ship's cat. She was strong when Jean Lafitte buried her out here, and that's some years back."

The man's voice was a deep mutter like some far off storm. It made young Jones sit down without quite knowing why. He hung his legs over the forty foot drop to the water and said—

"Did I hear you mention Jean Lafitte?"

The man's chuckle came from deep in his chest, under the black beard.

"You did, mate! And a good man he was too—particular in his choice of liquor. This rum, now, was the best of the best distill Barbados ever had. Eighteen-nine, lad. Jean sent us to take that ship special."

Jones did not believe the bearded man. He was angry that any one should childishly tell him a story so absurd. But before he could speak, he found the bottle in his hand, then at his lips.

From that moment, anything was possible. The rum burned like fire; a golden fire that sent its glow upward into his head and downward into his stomach.

"Ah!" he said, blinked and held the bottle to the light.

The man, chuckling silently so that the black beard danced on his chest, took it from him.

"Yes," he said, "Jean had a town here on Grand Terre—long before they built this fort. It was different then, a bigger island and a right good place till Jean made things too hot for himself. We buried that liquor for him in the Summer of 1812, me and my mate here. His name's Hovsep. Mine's Belshar."

Jones did not even blink. He shook hands with his friends Hovsep and Belshar and took another pull at Jean Lafitte's rum. A silence fell. Below, schools of small fish swam through the clear water. A fishing boat made her way toward the shrimp sheds of Grand Isle. In the channel a silver tarpon leaped clear and struck the water with a slap.

Jones roused himself and collected his thoughts, not without some trouble.

"This fort," he said. "They did a good job. It's sinking and it's been through four hurricanes, but the walls are still plumb."

The man called Hovsep flicked dirt off a joint to look at the mortar. The one called Belshar leaned out dangerously to look down.

"It is," he said. "True as a table. We've seen some walls, Hovsep and me. Castle walls and forts and palaces and cities. Aye, cities. There was one—"

He broke off, chuckling, his eyes on the shining distance. And to Jones that chuckle had a grim sound; as if the joke had been one not easily laughed at by those who were the butt.

"Tell him, Hovsep," Belshar said. "Tell him what happened to the wall at the place they called the City of Palms. What was its right name?"

"Jericho," Hovsep said; and at the sound of his voice Jones sat up straight.

A calm voice, and pleasant; but, like his look, it seemed to come across great distance. Like his face, it was not quite human.

"Tell the lad," Belshar said. "It's a good yarn, and all afternoon to spin it."

Hovsep laid one chocolate hand on the masonry and looked beyond Grand Isle.

"It goes back," he said, wetting his throat with Lafitte's rum. "We were young, Belshar. A man does things when he's young he won't tackle after he learns sense. And that's well, because it takes foolishness to do some good things.

"We follow the sea, young fellow, Belshar and me. Always have, since almost the beginning. But once in awhile we find ourselves ashore and this was one of the times. Too far from the sea, lad. Farther than a seafaring man has any business to go.

WE WAS scouts then [Hovsep continued] on account of Belshar here tickling a man a little too hard with his knife; which was nothing to bother about in them days, only this fellow turned out to be a king's nephew. We left the Persian Gulf and set a course north by west into the wilderness. It was there we met up with this army of Israelites under an old chief named Moses.

Most likely you think of Hebrews the way they are now, spread over the earth like a plant that has seeds blowing on every wind; doing half the business of the world. It's maybe funny to you to think of them as fighting men. But they were—a wild, hard, hairy lot, sleeping in tents, wondering where the next meal was coming from, scrapping with everybody they met; and licking 'em too, mostly.

There's reasons for their being a fighting tribe. Some things about the Hebrews don't have no reason, but this has. First off, the kids grew up with a goat herder's staff in one hand and a sword in the other. They were tough as rawhide, then, and trained to war. And there was the Idea.

This old chief, Moses, was a leader, take my word, lad. He'd brought this bunch of slaves out of Egypt and through the Sinai desert—and that's a place to cook the skin off your back—just because he was man enough to do it. He had visions that helped him along. One of them was that the Israelite god, Iahweh, had promised them all the land where the Canaanites lived, what they call Palestine, now. There wasn't any argument about it; the country belonged to them, and they were going to take it—hell and high water notwithstanding. Iahweh had said so. When people get hold of an idea like that, they're mighty hard to stop.

Not very long before the time I'm speaking of, Old Moses died, and he picked a man named Joshua to take over the Israelite helm after him. Now this Joshua was a natural born guerrilla fighter. We say a good navigator takes his ship through by watching all the signs and taking a bite of the bottom. Joshua was that way about war. He had a sixth sense for the weak, unguarded spot in the enemy defense. And when he'd picked the spot he threw his men at it like a fist at your jaw. He was hard as a sword edge on discipline, but his troops would have followed him to hell.

That's the man we was scouting for, this time I'm speaking of. We'd fought our way up by degrees and made camp a day's march the far side of Jordan River; to kind of get our breath and make all ready for the big job, you might say. All over east of Jordan is wild, rocky country not good for much. But west of Jordan is the Canaanite land, the country Iahweh had promised them. It was rich, but likewise full of fighting folk that would defend their own homes, and the cities were walled. The first of those cities was Jericho, just across Jordan from our camp.

Joshua called us into his tent. He was a lean man, all-leather looking, with a hard black eye and a nose like a curved sword. When he talked he kept his bronze fighting ax between his knees and played with the handle.

"You men," he said when we were before him, "have been in Jericho, I think."

It gave me a turn, having him say that, because we hadn't said anything I could remember about being in Jericho. But Joshua had a way of knowing more than you thought. I told him yes, we'd been there, a long time ago.

"That's a strong place," he said, "and I don't doubt they know we're coming. We'll find it closed and ready to stand siege. What I want to know is the weak spot, the place we can attack and break through before they know what's happening."

"There isn't any weak spot," I told him. "The city's built up on a kind of a plateau—like the poop deck of a ship. It's got only one gate and the walls are thick—double, in most places. They could pick off your men with arrows before they even got under the walls."

Joshua heard me out, then sat frowning off over the plain toward the river. He had to take that place, and we knew it. If he didn't, and went on into Canaanite country, his people could be open to attack from the rear. Besides, part of the Hebrew idea was to capture every town they came to and put the people out of the way. It saved trouble, and it was an order from their god. Finally Joshua said:

"You men go over there. Get inside the city and see what you can find out. When you get back, I may know what to do. This is a hard place, and Iahweh always helps me over the hard places."

That was true. Every time the Israelites got in what you might call a fix, somebody—Moses, or Aaron the prophet, or Joshua would have a vision and their god Iahweh told them what to do. But Belshar nor me, neither of us spoke up. We looked at each other and away. Joshua watched us.

"Of course," he said, "if you two are afraid, I'll send somebody else. An Israelite could do the job better, but I thought, knowing the country—"

Belshar was up before he finished.

"We'll go," I said. "But don't wait too long for us to come back. We might not."

In an hour Belshar had said goodby to his women and we were striking out toward the river, walking none too fast and not talking none at all. The sun was half sunk behind a hill and we'd stopped under a thorn tree to eat our dried meat and hard cakes before we either said a word. Twenty years is a long time, but there would be people to remember our faces in Jericho, and why we had to leave. We had a more than even chance of paying for those old doings.

"I wonder," Belshar says, tearing off a strip of meat with his teeth, "I wonder if there's any of them left. Is she still up at the grove, I wonder?"

"She'd have changed," I said.

And after awhile we went on, walking through the dark as silent as before, each thinking about the time we were first in Jericho, twenty years gone.

WE WAS attached to the king's household at the time, and a very nice political job it was, too, but we didn't stay in the palace, politicians being very handy with the knife when a man's asleep. We put up with a family that followed the linen trade, weavers, spinners and dyers. They were good folk, hard working and pleasant, and they had four of the finest kids you ever seen.

Rahab, the girl, was oldest—fourteen when we first come there, and wonderful pretty. Dark and fine built, and with a kind of fire in her you don't very often see. We was both foolish fond of her, but not even Belshar ever made a move to touch her, and he's a fool about women. Then there was three boys, a lot younger—fine brats all of them. And Rahab thought the moon and sun set where her brothers were.

Them Canaanites were a scummy lot, take my word, lad. But Rahab and her people were fine honest folks, and the girl was more. A year we stayed, and liked them better at the end. Toward Spring the second year, priests started coming around. It didn't take a guess to know what they was after. They wanted Rahab; wanted her for a temple girl in the sacred grove of Ashtaroth, up on the mountain. The High Place of Ashtaroth they called it, and they had women there to serve this goddess. She was like Venus. They thought she had a lot to do with love and crops and all such. The girls in her temple were like Vestal Virgins, only they weren't virgins.

In them days the priests took what they wanted. Rahab's folks just sat down and cried and made sacrifices and got things ready for her to go. There wasn't anything else they could do. I'll never forget the day they took her away. Along in early April it was, and all the Jericho rose trees blooming. Her mother and father and the three little boys all stood around in the court crying and carrying on. Seemed like I even saw a tear in Belshar's eye, him being young and soft-like in them days. But the girl, she never let out a whimper. Just stood with her lips tight and that fire in her eyes burning brighter than before.

That seemed enough to happen to a family—losing a daughter to Ashtaroth. But it wasn't. Besides Ashtaroth there was Baal, and Baal liked his meat young.

Ten months after they took Rahab came the king's birthday. Jericho'd been having good years. The king had plenty of gold and jewels in his treasuries and felt good about it. He decided to put on a big show to thank his god Baal and let the people know what a great man he was. Part of his jamboree was a sacrifice.

Like I told you, Baal wanted his meat young. Little boys were his special dish, and they had to be burned on an altar. Rahab's brothers were chunky, bright looking lads. One early morning priests and soldiers came and took them away. They didn't say yes or no or anything else. They packed those boys off to be held for purification till the great day.

Rahab's mother tore out most of her hair, and the old man put ashes on his head. Of course, they wanted us to get the boys out. We tried, but there ain't much use to fight a priest. All we did was get in trouble ourselves.

It wasn't long. The big day came and people had carnival in the town. When they had a holiday in them days, they had one—take my word, lad. You never seen anything like it, nor will. Singing and dancing in the streets. Drinking and hollering and other goings on to make your hair curl. Especially among them Canaanites. Baal and Ashtaroth, they told people to raise hell, and the people done so. The city was brimming full that day.

At night it quieted some, and all moved up to the end of a wide street where they'd built another high place. This one was a wood platform with big earth mounds on it like twin peaks. On each mound was an altar. There wasn't any light anywhere except from those two altars. The big fires threw light on to the priests standing by with knives, and on to the front ranks of people. Back in the dark the crowd stood. You couldn't see people, but you could hear the murmur and feel them, the way you know the sea is there on a thick night when nothing shows beyond the first waves.

Off to the right was the small temple where they kept the boys, and the king stood up in his chariot over there, too, out in front. Belshar and me were on the other side, keeping the crowd back with long rods. They wouldn't let us wear swords in the city, being strangers.

There were twenty boys. When the head priest stopped jabbering and hitting his head against the altar, some other priests began to lead them out, three at a time, because of some meaning three was supposed to have.

* * *

THE head priest whetted up his knife and used it. The fires flickered down and grew smoky. Sometimes the kids screamed when they saw the knife. Sometimes it was all over before they knew what was happening. Out in the crowd you'd hear a woman's yell, or a man's groan. Then the shout of the people—"A-ah!" They liked it, them Canaanites.

It wasn't long before the earth on them mounds turned red. I looked at Belshar and he had a lock of beard in his mouth, chewing on it. I knew what he was waiting for. They'd be coming out soon, and I thought of how they played horse, riding Belshar's neck, and remembered I never got to finish the boat I was making for the youngest one.

Baal was getting a big meal that night. Fifteen boys were gone before they led out Rahab's brothers. Belshar and me moved close together. They came into the firelight, one priest pushing the two oldest ahead of him. The second priest had the young one, and the kid looked up at him smiling, like he thought this was a picnic.

They climbed up on to the platform and the oldest ones hung back. The priest gave them a shove that sent the five-year-old to his knees. Out in the dark was a long wail, cut off, and I knew their mother's voice. The altar fires leaped up, and the head priest wiped off his knife.

The same thing must have come to Belshar and me at the same minute.

"I can't stand this!" I said, and right then he started forward, not looking right or left.

We didn't have no weapon—not so much as a knife. But in them days Belshar was strong as a bull. Before that priest knew what was going on Belshar swung his staff, and sent him spinning clear to the fire. I made for the other one. But he'd been warned, and he was quick. He dropped the youngest of Rahab's brothers and pulled a knife. I just had time to grab his wrist and bring up my knee.

The priest doubled up on the ground, dropping Rahab's brother. But the little lad had been scared out of his wits. He was afraid of me, too. Before I could get to him, he'd run straight back to the steps and tumbled down. There was no use to follow.

When I turned back, Belshar had the two older boys behind him. The head priest was the only one left on his feet, but he had that long sacrifice knife. Belshar was bare handed, having broke his staff on the other priest's head, but he stood up to the knife like it was made of wood. He hadn't no better sense in them days, and I doubt if he has yet.

I'd taken the knife away from the priest I did for as he fell. It was a clumsy knife, and my throw was bad, but it caught the head priest a glancing blow on the cheek and turned him enough for Belshar to swing his fist. The head priest went down, too.

Then I heard the people. I said they were like a dark sea before. Now they sounded like a storm ready to break. We'd worked so quick they hadn't got over their surprise till that minute. But they were mad, ready to tear us to pieces. And they could see us plain, though we couldn't see them.

Belshar took one of Rahab's brothers under each arm just as the king's voice sounded out, yelling an order. Arrows began to fly. We made a dive between the fires and off the back of the platform with the shafts whistling around us.

Now the positions were changed. They couldn't see us, the firelight being in their eyes. And we could tell where they were by the noise. The king's chariot made a clatter on the stones and the people all commenced yelling at once. I led the way toward the walls, Belshar pounding along behind me with the two lads under his arms.

I'd known a girl in that part of town, and by luck we were near her house. Nobody was there, on account of the sacrifices, and we went through and up on to the wall. Jericho has two walls, in some parts, and the houses are built across from one to the other, right on top. We ran along the inner one, ducking through the empty houses as we came to them.

It was mortal queer, lad, let me tell you. Here we were, running along the wall like rats, and there was all them people down below hunting us for our blood. We could hear them yell, and see the torches flare. It was like walking a sea wall, with the wind piling breakers up beneath. And there wasn't any way down, inside or out.

I took one boy from Belshar so we could go faster, and after awhile we passed beyond the shouting. They figured they had us cut off, I guess. The lower end of the town was quiet. We stopped up above the gate, figuring on a fight.

But our luck's always been good. We heard voices. Somebody outside was arguing with the gatekeeper to let him in, and we heard mules moving on the road. The keeper opened up to let in a country party that had come late for the celebration. As we slid down in the dark we heard him say he thought the sacrifices must be over because he'd heard yelling.

IT WAS dark as Egypt there by the gate. The party came in on their mules, one at a time. Belshar slipped through between one mule's rump and the head of the one following. I waited a chance and ducked through with Rahab's other brother. A woman saw me and set up a howl about ghosts and robbers. But the others laughed at her.

We stood the boys on the ground and waited till the next to last mule was through. Then Belshar grabbed the man off the last one while I held the animal's head. The gatekeeper said—

"All through?" and slammed the gate when he got no answer.

We put both lads on the mule and went away from there at a jog trot—following the trail up the mountain. The city ain't there any more, but the mountain is, I guess, and on top you'll likely find the ruins of an Ashtaroth temple.

It was early morning when we got there, and the grove of Ashtaroth looked pretty as sin with new light coming through the trees. The women looked pretty too. The head priestess come out, and we explained what had happened clean and honest. The Ashtaroth priestesses didn't like Baal's priests so much. You know how it is; two religions in the same place always try to cut each other's throats—just like two businesses.

They took the boys in to where Rahab was and gave us something to eat and a bowl of date wine. We sat on the grass eating and not paying any attention to the women that kept coming and going. A woman doesn't mean much when you're as hungry and tired as that. Then Rahab stopped in front of us, looking down.

She'd grown in the months since we'd seen her; had almost her full height. She never got to be a big woman. She'd grown older, too, and better looking. She was one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen. Living in the grove hadn't drawn the fire out of her, either. It was there, especially in her eyes. Right then she looked as if she'd burn up inside. We stood up and she gave us each a hand.

"Thanks," she said. "They're—all I'm going to have. I won't forget what you've done."

We knew how she felt about those boys. Being a woman of the Sacred Grove she wouldn't ever have a family of her own. It's hard to see anybody feeling a thing as much as she felt this. It embarrassed us, kind of. And she had to be told about the youngest. Belshar did it.

"They got the little one. He ran back."

She didn't say anything. Her mouth was tight, the way it was the day they took her away from home to be a Woman of Ashtaroth. And she looked tall. Rahab was a little woman, but she was tall when she turned and looked down at the city. All around were the date orchards, and the houses pink and white because of the rock they were built out of. It looked pretty, Jericho. She looked a long time before she turned back. It seemed like she could see something we couldn't. Something way ahead. People had visions in them days.

"My turn's coming," she said; that was all, though I've heard women put a curse on a place and not have it sound so bad. "My turn's coming."

We'd never forgot Rahab, though more than one thing had happened since, and as we walked through the night toward Jericho it all come back strong and full, like remembering some old drink you've drunk a long time before that shook you up more than ordinary. It gave me a queer turn to be coming back to Jericho like we were.

Just before daylight we forded Jordan, hip deep; and on the other side we met a farmer and his son with grain on mule back. We persuaded them two, and left them lying under a tree, while we took their clothes and their animals and went on toward the city.

They had a heavy guard at the gate, but we got in because we had grain. Soldiers came up and took mules and all in the king's name. The town was full —stinking full. Every goatherd and small farmer for miles around had come in with his family and all the stock he could bring. There wasn't room for all the people to sleep under a roof, and the animals crowded the streets. It was like a combined stable and street fair, and the smell rose up to the sky.

Everywhere we heard them talking about Joshua—only they didn't call him by his name. You heard them say "The Robber" and "The Evening Wolf", and they spoke quietly when they talked of him. News of what Joshua and his army had done before traveled ahead and the tales grew taller as they went. But they felt safe. We heard them brag how they'd wipe out Joshua if he tried to storm the walls. No enemy'd ever come into Jericho since they were built.

THEY looked prosperous, them Canaanites. We saw fine linen and brass armbands and some gold and jewels. The army had good weapons and everybody seemed to have had enough to eat for a long time. That was about the only change we noticed, that Jericho'd become even more prosperous than before. It seemed they'd had peace around there for a long time, and the country was rich. Otherwise, it wasn't much different than we'd last seen it: them rock built cities didn't change much; they either went back to the ground or stayed the same.

We walked up and down and round and round, listening to the talk and looking over the defense. Like I said, they felt safe and we could easy see why. All you needed to hold that city against twice Joshua's troops was plenty of arrows and men to shoot them, and they had those. It got to be noon, and still we hadn't no more idea of how Joshua could get in than when we left camp.

There weren't any regular restaurants in them days. We went to a sort of inn near the gate. It was a big house, built over the wall, and on the first floor it had a big room covered with straw. Six or eight men were in there when we came, eating mutton and cakes and drinking palm wine—it's good wine too, lad.

Belshar and me sat down against the wall in the straw, dog tired, and a girl brought us a drink for a starter. All the servants in the place were women, it being that kind of a place. It was a custom in them days. If you went to a city and wanted food and shelter and women, you went to one of these inns.

Well, I drank my wine and hung my head between my knees to rest and take it easy before the grub came. All of a sudden Belshar crammed his elbow into my ribs so hard it took my wind.

In the doorway a woman was standing. She wasn't tall, though at first she seemed to be. She had gray hair, and her face was pretty hard, though smooth. But we couldn't mistake who she was. Rahab stood in the door looking at us. I could feel her eyes burn, clear across the room.

I started to get up, but she shook her head, moving it only an inch. I sank back again with my head between my knees, but I could see her feet turn and go away.

After awhile the girl servant came back and told us to come with her. Some of the men grinned and winked when we went out. The girl led us through a passage and up some stairs and into Rahab's own rooms. The place was whitewashed and clean smelling—and as bare and simple as a nun's cell. She sat in a chair and looked at us and we stared back. It's a wonderful queer thing, meeting somebody unexpected after twenty years. For all the gray hair Rahab hadn't changed much, though. Her face was harder—whose wouldn't be after the life those priests had given her? But the strength was there, and the fire back behind her eyes. When we didn't speak, she smiled.

"I am Rahab the Harlot," she said. "I keep a strangers' house by the gate. All Jericho and many other places know who I am. The Grove of Ashtaroth is no place for young boys. I left it and set up here. My brothers are grown and married. They have done well. I am Rahab the Harlot. What brings you back, you two?"

We told her, and she listened, nodding her head. When we spoke of Joshua she smiled, and I'd have been afraid if I hadn't been her friend.

"The Evening Wolf will destroy this city," she said. "I have known that for a long time."

I asked her how he was going to get in. The walls of Jericho looked mighty high and strong to me.

"It is my turn," Rahab said. "They burned my brother before Baal, and I am Rahab the Harlot, whom they took to be a woman of the grove. Is it true that Iahweh, the Israelite God, asks no sacrifices and is not worshiped in such places as—as where I was?"

"You know a lot," I said. "They've got a pretty good god as gods go. He asks no human sacrifice and there are no 'high places' or 'women of the groves'. Iahweh's a god of battles. But how is our army going to get into Jericho?"

"Go to the north wall," she told us. "Two years ago came a storm and did great damage. The king is fat and lazy from good years. He does nothing, and the people are like him. The Wolf will destroy this place."

We went to the north wall after we'd had a meal in Rahab's rooms. It was like she said. This storm must have been a regular cloudburst, and the water washing down over the edge of the plateau where the city was, had done the wall a lot of harm. They'd worked on it some, quite recent. But it takes a long time to move big rocks and build a wall, and they'd just let it slide. The city was strong enough as it was to make 'most any man feel safe.

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WE CAME down off the inner wall pretty much pleased with ourselves and wondering what kind of a scheme Joshua would figure out to break this weak spot. Maybe we showed we felt good. Maybe it just had to happen and then was the time. I saw a man in a doorway looking at us hard. Belshar turned his head, and this man set off down the street as fast as his legs would move. He was an oldish man.

"I don't like that," Belshar says.

I didn't like it either. We went by a roundabout way, and where the crowd was thickest, back to Rahab's house. We sat down in the straw until the girl servant came to ask if she could do anything for us.

"Honey," Belshar says, "there's a lot you might do, if I had a little more time. Go tell Rahab that me and my friend are back and we expect some men along any minute."

"Men to see her?" the girl asks, blink-ing her big eyes.

"No, honey, men to see us. Run tell her."

Rahab didn't come into the room, but soon the girl was back telling us we'd better leave; Rahab said so. We went without asking questions, and just outside we met a young man. He led us through another house and along the wall to Rahab's again. He was Rahab's second brother, the one I'd carried along the same wall twenty years before.

"They don't know where you are," Rahab told us. "But the head priest's the same one you knocked over that night. He's old, but he hasn't forgotten. They'll catch up with you."

It wasn't very long, either. We heard men outside in the street. In a minute they were inside—hollering for Rahab rough and loud, the way soldiers do when they get a chance to bully somebody around. Rahab went down, and her brother took us up a narrow flight of steps and out on to the flat roof.

I told you Rahab's people followed the linen trade. She and her women still did some weaving, and the roof was about a foot deep in flax spread out to dry. We lay down on the floor and Rahab's brother covered us up. Then he went back to his own house. It was hot under the flax, and we were like to smother; especially Belshar on account of his beard. I've had to lie quiet a few times in my life, but I never did like it any. You get cramps in places you never felt before.

Down below they were tramping through the house, talking loud to Rahab and yanking things around. Then I heard them on the stairs. I told Belshar not to breathe so loud and lay as still as I could.

In a minute the sergeant was saying—

"Poke around with your spears, men."

The dust and heat were tickling my nose and the spear points made a scraping noise on the floor. My ear was right against the stone and I could hear it plain. The soldiers tramped all around us, stabbing at the flax.

Finally the sergeant said:

"All right. I guess they ain't here. No hard feelin's, Rahab. We got our orders."

In ten minutes Rahab come back and told us they'd gone with a drink in their bellies. She was laughing, and so was Belshar when he sat up, though a trickle of blood was running down his face.

"They tried to shave my beard," he said. "An inch to the left and Joshua would have lost a couple of first class scouts."

"Listen," Rahab said. "You two stay here till night. Then I'll let you down over the wall from my window."

"You're all wool and a cubit wide," I said. "We aren't going to forget this, Rahab."

"You bet you're not! When The Wolf comes into the city you're going to remember me and my family too. There won't be many people alive in Jericho when he gets through."

"There won't be anybody but you and your family," I told her. "You take a red string and tie it in the window. The Israelites will know what it means and let you alone. We'll see to that, if we have to blackmail Joshua. He only slipped from virtue once in his life, but he's sensitive."

We shook hands on that. Rahab was like a man in some ways. The girls brought us grub and wine, and in the evening when all the lights were out, she took us to her rooms and showed us a strong rope made fast to the window.

"Don't go over the fords of Jordan," she said. "They've posted a guard there. Go up to the mountains and stay two or three days in the grove. The girls will be glad to see you."

WE SLID down into the dark and done like she said. Three days later we were back in Joshua's camp at Shittim. We found him in his tent, just like he hadn't moved since we left. He sat there fiddling with his ax and staring off toward Jericho.

"It's like this," I said to him. "A big rain washed out the ground under the north wall. The outer wall caved in for maybe fifty yards, and there's some big holes under the inner one. It's been repaired some, but not very much. It's the weakest spot there is, but that isn't saying a lot. You couldn't get an army through."

Joshua didn't move while I was talking—not so much as a muscle of his face. He sat still for a long time after I finished.

"It's not good enough," he said finally, twisting his ax in his hands. "We might slip a few men under the wall at night and let them open the gate, but it isn't good enough. It might not work at all, and we'd lose a lot of men anyway. We've got to take this city some way that everybody will hear about and remember. They've got to be scared of us in Canaan. We'll wait till Iahweh tells me what to do."

We moved up to the river next morning, and crossed the third day after. All along we had ceremonies, and Joshua had twelve stones set up in a circle at his camp—Gilgal—and twelve more in the Jordan, to be a monument. It meant a lot to them Israelites, crossing Jordan. Forty years they'd roamed around in the desert, fighting, half starved, without any home. All that kept them going was the Idea—the promised land "flowing with milk and honey". Here they were.

At Gilgal, in sight of Jericho, they had a big feast. No more manna and goats' milk, but olives and dates and cakes made out of real grain. Take my word, lad, that was a celebration like you never saw. Christmas? That's just a nice custom, now. These Israelites had something to be glad over. I never seen folks so happy, nor so wild to go. They wanted to start right out and storm Jericho.

But Joshua wasn't going anywhere till he heard from Iahweh. Nobody could get a word out of him, and he wouldn't hardly eat. Just sat playing with the handle of his ax and thinking.

One morning, though, we came along and found his tent flap closed. That meant he was either sick, or talking to the Lord. Belshar and me stood by for orders.

When he sent for us late that afternoon, we found him putting on his shoe. He seemed kind of tired, but his eyes had a certain look that made Belshar jab me with his elbow. We'd be in battle before long.

"The Lord's captain made me take off my shoe," he said. "This is holy ground. Step around to the other side of the tent." He stopped while he laced up his shoe. "Now," he said, "what do you boys make of this? The Lord's captain said to march around Jericho every day for six days with the whole army. On the seventh day we march around six times. The seventh time, the priests blow a long blast on their ram's horns and the people shout all at once. That makes the walls fall down. It isn't that I don't think it will work. I don't doubt Iahweh. But I always like to help him when I can. Can you boys think of something we might do?"

"Well," I said, "them stones on the north wall won't need much help. They're ready to go over the edge any minute."

He looked at me sharp and nodded three times.

"Those gullies run right up to the walls, don't they?"

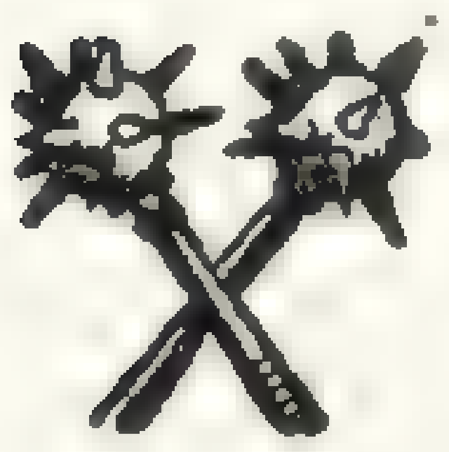
I nodded. Jericho sat up on this rocky plateau, cut off from the mountain by lower land. There were a lot of those plateaus—mesas the Spaniards call 'em—between the mountain and the river. And all around were deep gullies where the water ran off during the rains. From Jericho they ran every which way.

"That must be what He meant," Joshua said. "I'll detail the men—I'll do better, I'll go myself. Nobody in camp knows walls the way I do. They had me working for a mason when I was a boy in Egypt. You two can lead us to the place tonight."

We reached the walls a little before the first watch ended. There were clouds so thick you couldn't even see the stars, but Joshua didn't need any light. He ran his hand over the stones, and I heard him grunt like he was pleased. We had the axles off two captured chariots for levers. He set his men to work, prying at the foundation stone.

We worked all night, and when the sky began to turn gray Joshua stood back and looked things over for the first time.

"Six days?" he said. "We could tear the whole wall down in that time, and they wouldn't know it, either."



JUST then we heard horns blowing and the head of Joshua's army came round the corner, beyond bowshot from the wall. First the priests, blowing their horns, then the ark, then the troops, single file; and a wild, hard looking bunch they were, too. Joshua and me slid down into the gully after the men, and made our way through the brush at the bottom till we came to the army. As they marched by, we joined them, one at a time so nobody would notice, though the men of Jericho crowded the walls, wondering what in thunder the Israelites meant to do.

Every night for six nights we done the same thing. One of the rocks we slewed around so that a little shove would send it out from under. Other places we undermined and shored up with timbers. Every quarter hour during the night a guard passed on the wall over us and never noticed a thing, we worked that quiet and kept the wall that steady.

All them six days the people got heated up more and more till they were like to boil. Here was the camp, right where my finger is, and here's Jericho right here in plain sight. All day long they saw them pretty pink and white houses, the date groves and the fields. They'd been hungry a long time, them Israelites, and here was plenty of food that only needed taking. Besides, Iahweh had promised them this land, and Iahweh had told them to go take Jericho.

When we went off the seventh night, the whole camp was strung tight as a bow, waiting. Every man had his sword and ax sharpened and polished beside him, and the women went around singing and prophesying what a great victory Iahweh would give. Come morning and they'd take the first step into their land of honey and milk. It was a wild sight, to look back and see men waving their weapons in the firelight and the women weave back and forth, singing and laughing and tossing their arms.

We were ready long before dawn. Belshar and me rigged lines to the key timbers on the shoring, and Joshua had a long light battering ram made to push out the big stone where it would do the most damage. It was then, when everything had been done, that he began to act queer-like.

We could see him, not very plain in the starlight; but we'd been with Joshua for a long time. He sat there, straighter than usual, staring and staring across the plain without ever turning his head. An hour, two hours. Something was on his mind, and it made the rest quiet too. You couldn't hear a sound except when some man moved or spat, and the guards tramped by overhead. They had a double guard, tonight. Seemed like the Jericho men felt something in their bones of what was coming. You could feel dawn in the chilly air, and a kind of stir went over the world, like it does before day. But Joshua didn't do a thing. Just sat there.

When gray began to show and we could see each other's faces, he turned. It was like as if a statue could move its head and look at you—the statue of a fighting man and a man that believed in his god.

"I made a mistake," he said. "I have not put my trust in Iahweh. If we go through with this, His face will be turned away from His people. We will go, and leave the destruction of these walls to Him."

No one ever argued with Joshua, and mighty few ever disobeyed an order. The men slid down into the gully after him and disappeared. Already people were on the wall, and talk started to buzz over our heads. It's a wonder they weren't seen.

But I didn't go right away. I was minded to, but somehow I couldn't move. A man that's seen as many sacrifices and prophesies as I have ain't sure of a thing like that. It's easy to be mistaken in what a god tells you. And a man might be mistaken in his god. Them people inside the wall believed just as strong in Baal and Ashtaroth as Joshua and his Israelites did in Iahweh.

Then I saw Belshar. He'd moved off a few steps, but stopped and stood looking back at me. He don't believe in anything, Belshar don't, not unless he can see it or hear it or drink it. He come on back.

"What about Rahab?" he says. "This means a lot to her."

I looked at the wall, beginning to show plainer in the gray light, and remembered how Rahab had stood on the mountain looking down on Jericho that morning twenty years gone. I could see how her eyes burned, back behind. I looked at Belshar and remembered the sacrifice fires growing smoky and dim with young flesh for Baal, and Rahab's little brother running back.

I didn't say anything, but sat down to wait. Belshar sat beside me. The sun threw up streaks in the sky and you could see pretty plain. It was ticklish, waiting there under the wall. If somebody'd leaned out and looked down, we'd take an arrow in the back. The light grew by the minute.

FINALLY the sun's rim came up over a hill, and just then we heard the horns blowing, way off. Two or three men on the wall yelled at once, and people began climbing up, all talking together. But they were looking at the army, not at us. Pretty soon the priests came in sight, blowing short blasts on their horns. A few bowmen on the wall cut loose with arrows, but they fell short of the army. We knew Joshua and the rest of the work detail had joined them, but we couldn't see them.

The Israelites went around once, twice, three times. Up on the wall Jericho men were jabbering together, wondering what was going to happen, worried a little. The Israelites acted different, today. When Joshua's army passed the fourth time, they began to quiet down. People are like that. When they get excited or scared, they jabber a lot at first, then they quiet down and just watch. When the Israelites went round the sixth time you could hardly hear a sound, except them horns.

They'd blown little short blasts. Now it was the seventh time around. Belshar and me got to our feet as the priests came in sight. They passed, and the army was in front of us. It was still for a minute. We could even hear some birds fussing in a date palm.

The priests blew again, all together. The sound came across, full and deep, against the wall of Jericho. You could pretty near feel it. Then the Israelites yelled, a long wild whoop crashing in behind the horns.

Belshar took the rope over his shoulder and went down the steep bank, straining against it. I took up the light ram and commenced pushing on the big stone. I felt it slip, and heard the shoring timbers crack under Belshar's pull. I shoved again—hard.

The stone turned, and all of a sudden squirted out from under like a lemon seed. I jumped, half falling. Belshar was ahead of me, with the key timber clattering down behind him. He picked me off the bottom by the scruff of the neck and we looked up at one of the queerest sights any man ever seen.

Just like we'd figured, the middle of the wall buckled out. A man in a green tunic slid off and went turning over and over in the air still holding a spear. Then another man slid off and another, all down the line. Joshua'd figured the balance better than he knew. That whole length of masonry was coming over, just like a breaking wave. For a minute it was over our heads, spilling off men like foam.

Right beside us a gully came in at a sharp angle. We ran. Let me tell you, lad, our feet moved faster than ever before or since. We got round the turn and threw ourselves flat.

The crash shook the whole ground and made my ears numb. Looking out from under my arm, I saw dust and rock and a man or two falling out of the air. Then the crash died away in a long roll.

I looked for Belshar, but before I could find him, what seemed ten thousand Israelites were all around me. They were still yelling, waving weapons, wild with joy and heat of battle. I got to my feet and went along.

For a little while there wasn't anything to it. A lot of Jericho's best men had gone down with the wall, and having it go down like that had rolled them on to their beam ends, you might say. But they came back. Those men knew what they were up against: Joshua gave no quarter, to man, woman or child.

Arrows began to pour down from the houses on top of us. The man next me spit blood and his knees buckled. I picked up his sword, and went on with the rest. But not far. Up ahead something had stopped the leaders, and there we were, bottled in a narrow street with bowmen picking us off from above. For a few minutes nobody seemed to know what to do.

Then the Israelites gave back a little and Joshua walked through. His lean face was set and serious, but he didn't look like he was in a battle. This was his business, winning fights, and he just went about doing it. He gave orders here and there, and in a minute men had broken into houses and the front was formed against the Jericho men who'd made a stand in the street.

I moved up, and for awhile we were chest to chest, shield to shield, sword against spear. Any man that fell got tramped to death in the press, and it was so close you could hardly swing a weapon. If it hadn't been for getting hold of his beard and using my sword for a dagger, the big Canaanite that got me round the waist would have done me in most painful.

But there was more to the army than Joshua and his fighting men. There was the Idea. Iahweh was on their side. How else would the wall come down when they blew their horns? I've seen fighters, lad, the kind you hear stories about ever after, but none so fierce and exalted-like as them.

WE BROKE the Jericho men and went down the street, driving them and killing those we could catch. At the corner we broke up into bands, each going a different way, cleaning the streets and driving them from the houses as we went. Wherever they stood stubborn, Joshua came, and we broke them. By and by the arrows fell off from a rain to a drizzle, you might say, and there were few that stood up to us. It got to be a kind of rat hunt, and I didn't have stomach for that.

I left the pack I was with and started toward Rahab's house, following the wall. Israelites had been through here. Houses were gutted. Wrecked furnishings and bodies lay in the street. It was quiet; nobody seemed to be alive there.

A hand like a bear's paw fell on my shoulder and I gripped my sword, wondering if I'd have time for a short thrust before I died. But it was Belshar. He was bloody but not hurt. His eyes had a shine to them, like they always have when there's trouble, but his mouth was sober.

When we came to Rahab's house, a bunch of Benjaminite soldiers were dragging the folks out of the place across the street. They were a wild young lot. They'd stuck on shell and gold ornaments till they looked like freaks instead of soldiers. But they worked efficient, seeing that no one was left in Jericho like their orders said.

A red thread was wove in the window of Rahab's house, and it stood quiet, like a house that some hurricane has skipped for no reason. I pounded on the door with my sword hilt and Rahab's brother let me in.

Just inside was a litter of pottery and shell and ivory smashed all over the floor. For a minute I wondered if the Israelites had forgot and come in here. Then I looked up. Every house in Jericho had a niche over the door, and on that niche sat images of Ashtaroth and Baal. Rahab's house had had them, but they weren't there any more.

We stepped over the smashed gods and Rahab's brother shut the door. All the family was there.

"Joshua took the palace," Belshar said. "They've killed the king and the head priest. What a day! They'll talk about this as long as folks have tongues."

They only looked kind of dazed, as if they couldn't understand what had happened. Rahab kept on looking out the window at the soldiers, as if she hadn't heard. But after a minute she turned.

There was a smile on her mouth, a small, cold smile that was terrible strange under her hot eyes. She stood there not saying a word, like as if she wanted us to notice something.

I got it, after a minute; the faint smell of smoke drifting down on the wind. Joshua was burning Jericho . . .

* * *

A smell of smoke was in Jones' nostrils. He saw the flash of swords and axes; heard the screams of women, the groans of dying men, the voices of Joshua's Israelites raised in a fierce, joyful shout of praise and thanksgiving to their God.

With a start he became aware that the voice with its strange distant sound had stopped. Under his feet the green gulf was tranquil, empty now of boats except for a skiff pulled by two men, which disappeared round the island's shoulder even as Jones watched.

He turned to his chance companions. No men were beside him on the wall. But the smell of smoke persisted. Down on the beach the party he had come with had lighted a cooking fire. The smoke blew toward him.

He looked around, and his eye lighted on the bottle, ancient, covered with earth mold. He picked the empty thing up, sniffed. A pungency, somehow like golden fire, mounted in his head. That was no dream.

Very carefully he dropped the bottle over the edge. Fish darted toward its sinking shape. Slowly Jones turned; a new believer in miracles parted the bushes and made his way down the granite steps of old Fort Livingston.

By the Author of "Four Years Beneath the Crescent"

GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

Venezuelan Border Days

SHORTLY after the beginning of the Gomez régime I arrived at Caracas, the capital city of Venezuela.

I had read news of Castro's trip to Europe and of Gomez's coup; had left the remnant of the Mexican forces I was commanding during the Flores-Magon uprising, and had made my way to my native land. After eight years of roaming over the world it was deeply satisfying to come home. It was also an opportunity to serve my country in its grim struggle upward.

The situation I found, however, was disappointing. Gomez was surrounded by the traitors who had helped him overthrow Castro, and they were intent on buttering their own bread—if possible on both sides. That depressing reality notwithstanding, the year that I passed in Caracas I remember as among the pleasantest of my life. God knows that I am adaptable and have been able to enjoy life in varying environments, but this was home.

The landscape, the architecture, the gardens, the workmen who addressed me on the streets, and friends in the opera—all these things had a special quality, of things long known and long carried in the blood.

And then there was the companionship of those engaged in the cause for which I was working; the cause that through all other adventures remains closest to my heart; the cause the purpose of which is to build a decent governmental structure in my country.

As soon as I realized that Gomez was not the man to improve on Castro's doings in any important way, I made declarations in the press to that effect, and in pursuance of a promise given Doctor Rangel Garviras that after his death—he died two weeks later—I would go to El Tachira, our native state, to try to save our Nationalist Party of the Andean States from destruction at the hands of Gomez. I decided to do my best, although I knew to what lengths Gomez would go to prevent me from accomplishing my purpose.

It was not a pleasant job, to tell the truth, that I had undertaken, because I realized that while I remained in Caracas I was comparatively safe. My imprisonment or assassination would have caused not only a scandal, but perhaps something worse, for I was rather popular in our capital city, both among the upper strata and the populace. Besides, at the time of the summons, I had been preparing to go to Europe to get my degree of Doctor of Philosophy. My Caracas friends, who knew of my prospective trip to the Old Country, but who did not know of my promise to Dr. Rangel Garviras, were surprised and alarmed when I announced my intention of spending a season among the wild mountaineers of the border states. They knew, as I did, that the minute I left the protective walls of Caracas, Gomez would turn his bloodhounds loose on me, for the sword of Damocles was constantly dangling over my head.

About the middle of December, 1910, I reached Maracaibo on my way to El Tachira. At that time Maracaibo had not yet developed into the second largest oil producing center of America. It was, however, a very active and growing Venezuelan seaport, serving as the outlet of our Andean States and the Colombian province of North Santander.

When our steamer slowed down at the entrance of the mouth of Lake Maracaibo, I looked upon the gray battlements of the fortress of San Carlos, where so many unhappy political prisoners have perished during the Castro and Gomez administrations. I could not help remembering a friend who was there at the time, suffering the tortures of the damned, and thought of the possibility of my undergoing a similar ordeal. I did not know, though I might have suspected, that there was an order for my arrest waiting for me at La Uraca.

In Maracaibo I met one of the engineers of a British oil syndicate, which was prospecting in the State of Zulia. He had chartered a schooner to take him to San Lorenzo, on the eastern shore of the lake, where he intended to inspect the Mene Grande district. He invited me to come along, and I readily accepted his invitation, for I was anxious to get acquainted with that part of the lake.

While crossing the lake on our way to the mouth of the Catatumbo, where I expected to catch a river boat for Encontrados, a large black cloud approached us from the opposite side of the lake. When it swept over us, this cloud proved to be composed of billions of flying ants. After sunset, when the ants had disappeared, the sky was illuminated again and again by distant lightning, flashing with the regularity of clockwork, a phenomenon which geologists attribute to the emanations produced by the enormous petroleum deposits underlying the lake and the jungle that surrounds it.

THAT night we ran into a heavy electrical storm. The sullen green waters of the lake began to toss nervously as we followed the tide through the deeper shadows and along the headlands, where the swells hammered the coastal cliffs. Once we barely missed running into one of those peculiar Indian villages built on stilts about ten feet above the water, which caused Alonso de Ojeda, the Conquistador, to call our country Venezuela, which means Little Venice.

The sturdy crew of Maracaiberos steered our craft across the seething waves with masterly precision and kept her going while the night roared like an angry lion. Sometimes a couple of them would lower themselves in a crazy *cayuco,* or small dugout canoe, to explore the passages ahead in the darkness.

As the schooner tumbled along, the ship's lamp swung from the masthead like a speck of sulphur in the pitch-dark chaos. The hurricane came belching out of the night, howling and whining in the rigging above us.

Then, as suddenly as it had started, the storm subsided. The lightning stopped and silence crept over the vast black scene. A crippled moon climbed over the horizon only to disappear again behind the slow shifting clouds that roamed the sky.

Morning found us standing well off from shore, the hush of dawn hanging over the sheltered waters of a lagoon near the mouth of the Catatumbo River. The skyline was of a faded blue tinged with ivory, unbroken by clouds. When the sun rose over the rim of the world a flock of gaily colored parrots came winging their way with hoarse cries and hovered above us when our schooner let down her anchor in the bay.

A river steamer presently appeared and I took passage on her. As soon as I was aboard I hung up my hammock and, wrapped in a red Goajira blanket, snuggled down for a few hours' rest.

The steamer sailed against the current in a southerly direction, plowing the still waters in a light that increased like the blares of bugles. Uprooted trees floated past us, and floating islands of glossy swamp vegetation wandered about our course, forcing the little steamboat to look for shelter again and again along the curving shoreline.

After a few hours I left my hammock and whiled the time away by shooting at the alligators that could be seen basking in the sun on the baked mud islands or on the grass banks of the shore, beneath the *guayabos, ceibas* and other forest giants. Where the river churned its foam around a bend, gray backed tapirs, bands of chattering monkeys, or a lone egret with silver wings could be descried lurking beneath the palms, but they disappeared at the approach of the boat.

A blanket of cream colored clouds was settling slowly over the glittering snow peaks of the Merida range; the sun faded and the slanting shadows blurred the shore, enveloping in a mystic dusk the jungle wastelands of the Perijana mountains, where, according to ancestral lore, Eldorado was supposed to lie.

At Encontrados, the head of navigation, I took a train for La Uraca, the terminal station of the Tachira railroad. At La Uràca a reception committee was waiting for me. It consisted of a platoon of infantry with fixed bayonets, commanded by a lieutenant who greeted me by declaring me a prisoner of his Excellency, General Juan Vicente Gomez. I was escorted on horseback to Colon, in the State of Tachira. From there, according to the program of the reception committee, I was to be sent the next day, decorated with heavy irons, to the fortress of San Carlos, where I would be a guest in perpetuity.

My only chance of declining these honors successfully was by getting in touch with my political friends at San Cristobal, the capital of the state. Fortunately an acquaintance, who had traveled to La Uraca on the same train, had sent a wire to San Cristobal, whereupon the governor and his secretary-general, who were my friends, ordered that I be taken to San Cristobal first.

As soon as I was in the presence of Governor Ontiveros, I told him quite frankly what I was up to. In an hour

I was released and allowed to remain in El Tachira under parole not to rebel against the government while Ontiveros was at the head of the state.

My arrival, which was a pleasant surprise to some, was rather a worry to others. For as soon as I had changed my clothes, I got busy. That night I had a talk with some of the principal members of the party, and the following day, at 4 P.M, I ordered a thousand copies of an open letter I had written to be distributed. In this letter I made it very explicit that I had come to the state in pursuance of a promise given to Dr. Rangel Garviras on his deathbed, to prevent the Nationalist Party from becoming a battleground for Castro and Gomez.

I KEPT up this printed fire during the seven months of my stay in El Tachira. In order to organize the movement that would make my printed proclamations effective, I made frequent trips to Cucuta and other parts of the Colombian frontier province of North Santander, as well as several excursions to the *llanos,* or Venezuela's prairie lands, where some of our most resolute horsemen are bred. They compose the deadliest cavalry in South America.

To reach the *llanos* I had to run the gauntlet of the Gomez garrisons at El Amparo and Periquera, on the upper Arauca and Apure Rivers—these lands lying outside the authority of Governor Ontiveros.

I was kept extremely busy during those seven months. Our party was there, but it was demoralized. Through all obstacles and difficulties, we were getting ready to show Gomez that Venezuela was not so readily for sale, that men were to be found to risk their lives to prevent the consummation of business transactions detrimental to the national interests and the national dignity. During my trips through the savannas of Arauca, I was getting in touch with our partisans and preparing for our push against the administration.

For the realization of our plan we were counting on fifteen thousand rifles and several million rounds of ammunition. These were in the possession of the garrison of El Tachira; and Governor Ontiveros, realizing that sooner or later he would be replaced by one of Gomez's intimate friends, had made unmistakable advances to our party.

Our success, therefore, depended entirely on whether Ontiveros would have nerve enough to back us when Gomez replaced him. As it turned out, we had backed the wrong horse, for as soon as Ontiveros received orders from Gomez to turn the military governorship over to Eustoquio Gomez—of San Carlos fame—he weakened and left for New York, where he raised the cry of revolt. It is an old story.

As a result of his fantastic procedure, our situation became extremely critical. We found ourselves up a very tall tree. With Eustoquio Gomez in control of the state, there was no opportunity to arm our men adequately. We were practically left defenseless. On the Colombian side of the line, not a rifle was to be obtained. The only armament on that side belonged to the garrison at Cucuta; outside of that there were only a few odds and ends.

We were in danger of being imprisoned at any moment. And rather than sit down and cry about it, I resolved to take any chance that should offer itself. I broke through Eustoquio's patrols, crossed the border near Aguas Calientes, and after six weeks crossed the frontier back into Venezuelan territory at the head of eighty men, divided into two groups, with the intention of legalizing, soldier fashion, a formal protest against the Gomez rule.

Unfortunately we could not follow up our initial successes. Spies had slipped into our ranks. Many men along the border were cleaning their six-shooters, for want of better weapons, to join us, when the news of the betrayal spread. We were forced to fight our way back into Colombia, after having reached the suburbs of San Cristobal.

After reentering Colombia, I disbanded my men, and shortly afterward I was ambushed by a group of thirty Colombian gendarmes, commanded by a captain, who disarmed me and led me in the direction of Cucuta. I managed to escape by knocking the captain over and jumping down a precipice into the Tachira River before the gendarmes could open fire.

Two days later I was ambushed again, but rushed through the night—on a borrowed horse—at such speed that I reached the Gramalote Mountains still a free man. There I was joined by several of my companions and a gang of gentlemen of leisure who did not like to look a gendarme in the face on either side of the frontier.

After spending several months in the Gramalotes, I received a communication from Governor Cortes informing me that I was at liberty to return to Cucuta and to remain there unmolested, if I wished to do so.

That was good news. I dressed for the occasion—white linen riding suit, patent leather boots, silver spurs, brown velvet sombrero, and two days later I rode into the patio of the government building to shake hands with his Excellency. I was instantly surrounded by red trousered soldiery with fixed bayonets and before I could break through their line, the governor's secretary appeared and requested me to see his Excellency before doing anything rash.

I have seldom felt so angry as when I rushed into Cortes's office. Cortes allowed me to calm down and then explained to me that Gomez had threatened to send Venezuelan troops to dislodge me from the Gramalote mountains, unless the Colombian government did so within a specified time. To avoid international complications, he had been compelled, by strict orders from Bogota, to play a trick on me of which he did not approve personally. He assured me, however, that at Bogota I should be treated as an honored guest of the Colombian government. Cortes felt certain that I would enjoy meeting President Restrepo and his cabinet and spending a season in that most beautiful city.

So I started for Bogota, where, of all tragedies, I arrived minus my silk hat! No one, at that time, could be considered a real *caballero* at Bogota unless he owned a top hat.

MY TWO months' sojourn in Bogota was a very pleasant one. I look back on it with heartfelt gratitude. Everybody was kind to me, from the president to the humblest reporter. I was a guest by force, and they did their best to make me a guest of my own free will. And they pretended not to notice when, instead of taking the train for Girardot, on my way to New York, I mounted my tall, blooded, dappled mare, and took my way as fast as I could by way of Sogamoso and Labranza Grande for the *llanos,* to save what I could from the wreck of our previous revolutionary movement.

Valentin Perez, thinking that I was to be kept for the rest of my life in Bogota, had made a fresh raid into Venezuela by way of Arauca. In two weeks he had run out of ammunition and had to beat a retreat. He had been cut off from the border, however, and, according to information I had received at Bogota, was in hiding somewhere along the lower course of the Carcanaparo, east of the Laguna de Termino, in Venezuelan territory.

To give the gendarmes, who would surely be sent after the "honored guest", the slip, I directed my horse toward the east and plunged headlong into the wild Indian territory south of Pore, into which I knew the gendarmes would hesitate to follow me. This was merely taking a plunge from the frying pan into the fire.

After a few days' ride I could see only burned *rancherias,* an ominous sign that the Indians were on the warpath. Charred bones among the ashes or an occasional human skull indicated violent outbreaks. I took a northerly direction which, if I did not perish at the hands of Indians on the way, would bring me to the ruins of the famous Jesuit settlement of Caribabare. I kept a wary trail, watching the ears of my mare; she was a very intelligent animal and would be sure to warn me of approaching dangers. Once she stopped suddenly and nosed the air. I knew what that meant; cayuses have horse sense.

After scrutinizing the surrounding jungle for awhile, I slipped quietly out of the saddle and, taking off my sandals, led the animal by the bridle across a patch of tall grass, through which I could see the ruins of what looked like another raided cattle ranch. The horse snorted, pulled the halter out of my hand with a jerk and fell backward, kicking wildly in the air. A *matacaballo*—horse killer—snake had bitten her in the chest.

Angry as if a loved human being had been treacherously killed in my presence, I hacked the snake in two with my machete before it could disappear into the underbrush. The bite of the *matacaballo* is harmless to man and all beasts except horses, mules or donkeys, which, upon being bitten, collapse and lose blood through all their pores. The mare was panting and sweating blood at my feet, and I was overtaken by a genuine anguish for the faithful, intelligent brute whom I was powerless to help. In less than twenty seconds she was dead, her head resting on my bare knees and her sad eyes looking at me, shaking me with a grief that I am not ashamed to confess.

I must have been kneeling there for quite awhile, when the sound of galloping horses brought me back to reality. At first I feared that some gendarmes had followed my trail, but the galloping horses belonged to two *llaneros,* or pampas cowpunchers, who raced in my direction at full speed. One of them shouted "Indians!" and, pulling me by the back of my shirt, helped me to jump behind him on his horse. As we sped on, a dozen arrows whizzed by and a bullet whistled past my head.

That night we camped among the ruins of Caribabare. The *llaneros* told me that they had got lost in the bad lands trying to locate some stray horses and, after circling around for two days, had come upon a band of Goajibo Indians, who had chased them.

They promised to go back to their ranch and bring me a horse; they left some food for me; and one of them lent me his hammock and his mosquito net. The *llaneros* are pampas gentlemen.

CARIBABARE is a strange place. There was a queer, wild, mystic feeling in those crumbling ruins, once the wedge of spiritual civilization thrust into the jungle, but now beaten by that jungle and covered with a thick growth of vines and inhabited by snakes. It was difficult to envisage the stately Jesuit settlement that had stood there two hundred years before—until the Jesuit fathers were expelled from Colombia by King Charles III. The backwoodsmen of the neighboring region claim that the fathers left a vast treasure buried somewhere on the grounds of the settlement—perhaps beneath the walls of the monastery or in a subterranean chamber that they were thought to have blasted into a slanting rock wall on the opposite side of the creek.

The treasure is supposed to include valuable jewels taken from the ornaments of holy images, and a crucifix ten feet high, of pure gold and ivory, which presided over the *altar mayor* of the chapel. There is no record that the Jesuits took it away with them when they left the country. It is not surprising that more than one *llanero,* feeling the treasure fever burning in his blood, has entered that land of desolation and death, where the jaguar lifts its snarling voice and no echo drifts back from the age-old silences of the Paramo lands.

Caribabare is famous for its spooks as well as for its reported treasures. Vampires in the shape of venerable priests with phosphorescent eyes are said to wander over the ruins at night, twitching their hands, moaning pitiably, their tortured bodies glowing like hot coals.

As soon as the *llaneros* had left, I looked around for a suitable place in which to spend the night. After a short survey I decided to sleep in the old churchyard, sheltered as it was behind a high wall. It was less encumbered with vegetation and I found it easier to clean a spot there with my machete.

I hung my hammock and mosquito net between two *guaba* trees and made a fire to keep out intruders of the reptile family. When I finished my preparations a brick-red sun was sinking, outside the jungle, into the endless *llano,* and a pale light glimmered through the trees and gave the foothills of the cordillera, on the opposite side, a velvet brilliance. The night voices of the jungle were already rehearsing their choruses as I rolled into my blanket.

The pampas regions of Venezuela, into which I had plunged after my escape from Bogota, are remarkably interesting, politically, geographically, zoologically, sociologically—in every way.

The automobile road that descends today from the Colombian border halfway down to Periquera was not built in those days. That is the region where the forest ends and the plains begin. The only road that led from El Tachira to the *llanos* at that time was a beaten path called the San Camilo trail. It wound its way down from San Cristobal, along the ridges of yawning precipices and across the swampy virgin forests of the timber belt, reaching the endless grasslands of the State of Apure, where there are cow ranches, holding sometimes as many as fifty thousand head of cattle. Eighty per cent of those prairies are open range, owing to the big savanna fires which destroy the wire fences almost as quickly as they are put up. The work on the haciendas is done by *llaneros,* resembling cowpunchers of the Western United States in the days before sheepherders and Hollywood clowns, mounted on circus horses, invaded that free and lively domain.

Our cows are not longhorns, but belong to the old Spanish stock which was introduced into Venezuela in the days of the Conquest. They are generally big, well shaped, with standard horns, quick legged and wild. The Spanish *toreros* agree that our range bulls are in many instances equal to the best bred exhibition bulls of Spain—the ones that are turned loose every Sunday to slaughter a few helpless old cab horses and satisfy vicariously the bloodlust of Spain's populace.

THE horses of the *llanos* are magnificent. They also are descended from the Spanish stock—crossed with Arab—that was turned loose on the *llanos* during the Conquest. They have a clear eye, reddish nostrils, a swan's neck on a wiry chest, long body, thin fetters, wide strong hoofs, long waving mane and tail, and a gallop that can make the best riders dizzy. I have ridden many pure Arab horses in Syria, Mesopotamia and Palestine during the World War, so I know what I'm talking about.

You will not find a single nail in a *llanero* saddle. It is all sewed and stitched. The saddle horn is usually of silver in the shape of an animal's head, and so are the long, pointed, silver stirrups. The bridle consists of the iron bit and a thin strap to hold it in place behind the cayuse's ears, similar to an Arab bridle. All straps, the thin bridle lines inclusive, are made of cured rawhide, as is also the long *soga,* or lariat, which is attached by one end to the horse's tail, while the main roll remains fastened to the right-rear end of the saddle in such a way that when the noose of the head of the first roll (about ten yards long) catches and the roll pulls straight, the second or main roll (about twenty yards long) is easily pulled off the saddle and uncoils, giving the cayuse a chance to stop and spread out its four legs in expectation of the final pull.

The tails must be attached to their wiry bodies with iron glue, for they never come off. At times the cayuse will be pulled through the air like a ball at the end of a thread, but the tail stays put. When the hair finally wears off, the cayuses are turned loose for a few months to grow new hair, and they always respond faithfully and grow it.

Nobody will venture into the savannas on foot, for fear of getting hooked by the nearest cow. The *llanero's* equipment consists of a long, whetted knife, a rope and a *bayeton,* which is a thick, fleecy woolen blanket, two yards square, red on one side and blue on the other, with a hole in the center, like a poncho. He sometimes pulls it over his head to protect himself from the rain, but usually carries it hanging loosely across the saddle, ready for use should he get thrown off his horse, for it is the only effective weapon that a man can use in defending himself on foot against the wild bulls. In the *llanos* every man has to be a bullfighter.

The *llanero* never uses spurs while working on the range. He fears they may tangle his rope, which he throws with a marvelous accuracy, either backward or forward, to the right or left. The *llanero* saddle is so light that one can lift it with one finger easily; the saddle blanket consists only of a thin, leather covered grass mat. The cayuses are not shod, because no stones are to be found on those plains, save an infrequent rock ledge cut in two or laid bare by the current of a river. Building stones are generally drifted down from the mountains on rafts, as in central Mesopotamia. For that reason most of the ranch-houses, even the homes of wealthy ranchers, are made of wood with high, thatched roofs.

Well-to-do ranchers do not spend the rainy season in their haciendas as they used to do. They go to San Cristobal or other cities of the cordillera, or to the nearby cattle towns along the river banks, where they keep in touch with their ranch managers by messenger or by telephone.

The prairies and wooded sections of the lowlands represent for Venezuela what Morocco, Algiers and the Congo represent for France. They are our colonies. Eighty per cent of our cities, of our agricultural and industrial centers, are located on the high plateaus and the valleys of the Andean range and their ramifications. Those are our original settlements, where the Conquistadores built their homes and tilled the soil, because the temperate climate of the high plateaus enabled them to do their own farming, whereas in the lowlands, where our labor forces abound, the torrid heat forced them to employ peon labor exclusively.

The heat is not the only difficulty to be encountered in the *llanos.* There are also the tropical floods. These cover every year, and for several months, large sections of the savannas, rendering even horseback travel almost impossible, to say nothing of automobiles and carriages.

During the rainy season most of the *llaneros* remain marooned in their *hatos* or haciendas, as do the cattle, which take refuge in the *bancos,* or grass islands, which are formed by the higher levels of the flooded savannas. At that time traveling, especially across the *esteros,* or boglands, is done generally by means of saddle oxen, which are very surefooted.

The beginning of the rainy season is the time when the Indians start to get busy. They travel in light dugout canoes over the flooded plains, slaughtering cattle by the dozen with their long *lancetas,* or arrows, attacking isolated and defenseless squatters. They build their *rancherias* during the Summer months along the river banks, which are protected by impenetrable strips of jungle vegetation, sometimes a mile wide.

AMONG the undesirables of the *llanos* swamps you may count, in the first place, the alligators, great and small. You will notice them basking by the dozen on the dry river banks, and on the sandflats, sometimes by the hundred, with wide, gaping jaws in which tiny birds are usually picking and scratching, ridding the alligator of parasites, acting, in fact, as efficient volunteer toothpicks. The alligators remain motionless for hours among the tall grass, or half submerged in the brackish waters of a lagoon, watching closely for their enemies with cruel, shifting yellow eyes, ready to plunge into the muddy depths at any sign of danger.

The first alarm is generally given by the egrets, which accounts for the popularity of these birds among the jungle folk. The alligators never hurt them, even when those birds chance to step on their backs or heads.

The *esteros* are also a favorite hunting ground for the *culebra de agua*, or giant black water snake, which is the aquatic variety of the boa constrictor. The boa constrictor itself hunts only in the forest, hanging by its tail from a lofty branch, its small head turned up slightly, just above the ground, ready to grip with its small strong teeth the leg of unsuspecting deer, bushpigs, even half grown cows. As soon as it has got hold of its prey, the reptile lets go its tail and, falling, coils itself around its victim and breaks all its bones, leaving the carcass as limp as a wet rag.

The boa (according to what I've heard, for I haven't seen it myself) then covers the carcass with a thick layer of saliva, and then, opening its unhinged jaws, like a concertina, begins to swallow it very slowly. After a couple of hours only the horned head of the deer remains. To eliminate the horns, which even a boa can't digest properly, it grinds the muscles and tendons around its victim's spine sidewise with its diminutive, saw-like teeth, until they have been cut clean through, allowing the head to fall off. It takes the boa constrictor several days to digest its food, and while in that torpid state it can be easily killed with a club.

It is rather difficult to distinguish a boa in the gloom of the forest from the vines which are sometimes as thick as a human body. Human beings have been frequently attacked by boas, but I have never heard of a case where one was swallowed. In Venezuela we call the boa constrictor *traga-venado*, which means "deer swallower".

On a certain occasion, while rounding a *mata* in the Casanare plains, I heard a terrible commotion. On approaching cautiously to see what was the matter, I saw a boa holding with its tail the trunk of a tree while its teeth gripped the snout of a fair-sized young bull. Every time the bull drew back, the boa would stretch out like a rubber band, only to contract again the moment the bull relaxed. As soon as I had recovered from my surprise, I jumped off my horse and, with a slanting stroke of my machete, cut the snake in two. Whereupon the bull—the ungrateful wretch—charged me and compelled me to take refuge up a tree with the seat of my only pair of pants torn to shreds.

Our giant black water-snake sometimes attains an enormous size. It lives under water, especially in the big *esteros*. During the hot season it burrows deep into the muddy banks and lurks there curled up under the surface until an unsuspecting animal noses the water. Then, quick as lightning, the reptile seizes it by the snout or the leg, pulls it down and drowns it before it proceeds to gorge. The alligator also drowns its quarry before feasting upon it. The *llaneros* never drink water from an *estero* out of the hollow of their hands. They lower a horn tied to a string and scoop the water up.

On a certain occasion, while I was galloping wildly after some bushpigs with an officer of mine named Campo Elias, I ran without noticing it into a big black water-snake. My horse shied and, jumping like a goat in a half circle, nearly shook me off. When we struck the ground I was hanging to the saddle with one foot, but managed to get myself straightened by pulling leather.

The humiliation made me angry. I yanked out my machete and, with my *bayeton* hanging from my left arm like a shield, I jumped at the snake. The coil of its body was almost waist high, and over it, shifting slowly, I saw a yard of neck with a foot-long, wicked head hissing viciously at me through its two rows of tiny pointed teeth, the thin, rose colored, forked tongue moving rapidly back and forth. When I swung my machete and let Mr. Snake have it, the blade bounced back as if I had struck a piece of rubber. I had apparently delivered a flat or straight blow—perpendicular to the scales—instead of a slanting one.

I would have finished my career on the spot if Campo Elias had not hacked the snake at once, in the right way, slantingly and from below, severing the head cleanly. Even then we had to run for cover, for before the head had touched the ground, the writhing body was whipping the bushes all around, breaking their branches like so many toothpicks.

Deer are so plentiful in the *llanos* that one frequently notices them pasturing undisturbed among the cows, oblivious of the presence of horsemen—men are seldom compelled to kill deer for food.

MOST of the haciendas are well supplied with pigs. These animals, however, are very flighty and take to their heels whenever they get a chance, hunting out homes in the *caños* and *esteros*, where they thrive and grow tusks, probably to defend themselves against jaguars and mountain lions. Whenever a rancher wants a slab of bacon or a piece of roast pork, he has simply to take his shotgun and go to the nearest *caño* or *estero* for it. And, in the face of these facts, there are still North Americans who wonder why Latin Americans don't slave away their lives to build up a bank account!

If a traveler finds himself without food while crossing the *llanos*, all he has to do is to shoot the nearest cow and hang its skin on the bushes so that the punchers see it when they happen to pass by and take it to the ranch. The surplus meat—the whole carcass less the two or three pounds of meat that the traveler may have consumed—is left for the *zamuros*, the buzzards, to feast upon. Those poor birds are the scavengers of the pampas, and, therefore, the right to enjoy an occasional delicacy should not be disputed them.

One of the most disagreeable creatures inhabiting the *esteros* is the *temblador*, an electric eel. Its length varies between one and two yards, and its body is a living battery which accumulates energy until it bursts, unless it manages to discharge this surplus energy by touching a living thing. The river fords are usually infested by *tembladores*, ever ready to turn their batteries loose on the unhappy cows which, after being touched, let out a pitiable bellow and sink out of sight to be dragged away by the current and drowned. Their bloated carcasses are washed ashore and devoured by the vultures and alligators, who thus profit by an unholy alliance with the *tembladores*.

Once I underwent the unpleasant experience of stepping on a *temblador* while crossing a shallow stream. I fell on my face at the shock and would have been drowned in three feet of water if my servant, who was watering the horses, had not dragged me out. I do not remember having felt any pain when I was struck, and the paralysis caused by the shock lasted only about three minutes.

The most dangerous denizen of the *llanos* streams is beyond doubt the *caribe*, a fish about the size of a saucer and flat on both sides. It feeds on fresh meat only and travels in schools of several hundred. They do not attack men or beasts suffering from old injuries or saddle sores, but pounce on any creature with a fresh wound, or even a scratch, on its body. The minute the *caribes* sense fresh blood they attack their victim and tear the body to shreds almost instantaneously. Fortunately the *caribes* are migratory fish and do not lie in ambush like the *tembladores*.

Several times I have crossed the pampas rivers hanging to the tail of my horse, while I had a few bleeding scratch wounds, but I never met *caribes*, or I would not be telling of it now. My grandfather, however, when a boy, stepped knee-deep into the Arauca River and jumped out instantly with the calf of his right leg missing. His favorite slave who had jumped into the river ahead of him was never heard of again.

On one occasion, while crossing the Grijalba slough, one of my scouts was devoured by the *caribes* before my eyes, without my being able to offer any assistance. He was crossing on horseback, and when he reached the middle of the narrow slough he let out an agonizing cry and disappeared beneath the surface with his wildly pawing horse. The water above them turned purple, and the tiny fins of hundreds of *caribes* could be seen criss-crossing in every direction.

The *raya* is another pest of those regions that has maimed many a good man and crippled many a good saddle-horse. It is a fish similar to the ray, of a circular form, dark on top and light colored underneath. It moves flat on its belly along the bottom, stirring up the sand to hide its presence. Its short tail is attached to the body like the handle of a frying pan, and is provided, at its root, with a curved, horny thorn fringed with microscopic teeth like those of a saw. With this weapon it cuts and lacerates the tendons of the human foot or the fetlock of the horse that happens to step on it. I have seen strong men cry out in agony and faint when cut by a *raya*, while the horses wounded by them usually collapse, kicking wildly and moaning like human beings.

There are, besides these treacherous enemies, legions of red, yellow, black, bronze colored and polka dotted snakes and vipers, all poisonous and of every dimension, and countless varieties of vicious bugs which haunt those plains and their forest belts. And it would take volumes to describe adequately the different sorts of mosquitos that make torture their business. My legs, from the knees down, are still covered with hundreds of small dark spots, the scars of inflamed mosquito bites to which I have been exposed during my military excursions in that region.

Most of the time I had to ride barefoot, because boots and leggings rot away with the dampness—and again because barefoot it is easier to clutch the stirrups under trying circumstances. Every time we changed horses, the new ones, donated by friendly ranch owners, were broncos that had to be broken in during the first half hour. It was amusing to see some of our men whooping and bouncing up and down on their bucking cayuses, while the rest of us laughed and yelled like a band of wild Indians—until the horses realized the futility of trying to throw off that bunch of wildcats and fell to discipline.

Often I had to go through the performance myself while my men laughed good naturedly. For among our plainsmen, as among the Mexican *vaqueros*, the saying is current that no rider is a good rider unless he rolls over with his horse at least once a week. They would never have recognized me as their leader and followed me during my military escapades if I had not been able to perform their tricks as well as they did, and teach them a few new ones for good measure.

The *caimanes*, or alligators, are divided in the *llanos* into three classes: The *baba*, or dwarf alligator; the *caiman* proper, and the *crocodilo*.

The largest variety of our alligator family is the *crocodilo*. It is of a yellowish color, and is known to have reached the almost incredible length of twenty-five to twenty-eight feet. The *crocodilo* is a very rare animal. It is known as the King of the Alligators and, according to folklore, when it approaches other alligators while the latter are feasting, they are supposed to abandon their food and retire to a respectful distance, while his Royal Nibs eats what is on hand and takes himself away to his siesta.

The same ceremony takes place, according to the *llaneros,* with the *Rey de los Zamuros*—King of the Buzzards—which is white instead of black, and about twice the size of the ordinary variety. It is also a very rare bird, and its lesser fellows grant it obeisance. I saw once a *Rey de los Zamuros* while riding through the brush at the foot of the cordillera. At first I took it to be a condor, and it was only when I saw the ring of buzzard courtiers standing around it in a circle that I realized what it was; and then, of course, I respectfully removed my sombrero, while the black feathered courtiers bowed their wrinkled necks.

THE jaguar is fond of hunting *chanchos de monte,* or bushpigs, which are sometimes ferocious and travel in bands of from twenty to one hundred. I have spent hours at a time sitting on a branch, while a snarling band of *chanchos* tore at the roots below, making the splinters fly.

When a jaguar wants to hunt wild pigs, he usually climbs a tree near the water's edge, where the beasts are likely to go to drink at night. The jaguar lets them come and allows most of them to depart. Then, when the stragglers are about to leave, he pounces on one of them and jumps back into the tree with his quarry in his mouth.

Unless it has been angered or wounded, the jaguar of the *llanos* seldom attacks a horseman. *Llaneros* occasionally hunt it with their ropes. At sunset, when the jaguar, after a day's rest, begins to growl from the edge of a *mata,* or the forest belt, the *llanero,* guided by its growls, rides straight up to it with his rope ready in his right hand. As soon as he sights the feline, he slows his horse to a walk, while the horse, knowing what is up, keeps its head high to prevent the jaguar from jumping at the rider. Those cayuses are wise. They know that the jaguar will not be after them, but after the man-beast that spits fire and thunder.

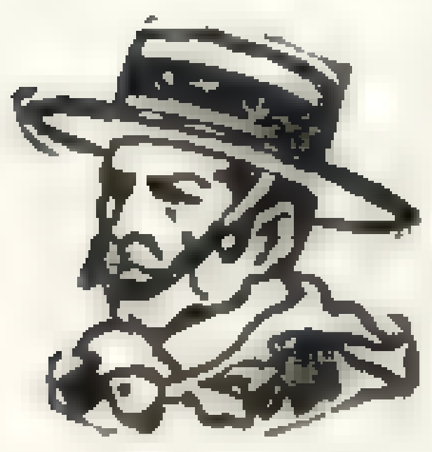
Then comes the critical moment—when the *llanero* has to decide whether he is near enough or not to throw the rope. I have gone through that experience and it is not pleasant. You can not swing the lariat over your head, but have to throw it with a twist of the hand, wheeling your horse around at the same time and racing for your life, without knowing whether you have roped your quarry or not.

If the rope catches, the jaguar will be delayed for a few seconds while he tries to untangle himself or to bite the rope through, in any case long enough for the lasso to tighten, whereupon the beast will be jerked through the air and dragged bouncing over the ground until it loses consciousness. Then the *llanero* jumps off his cayuse and his whetted knife finds its mark between the jaguar's shoulderblades.

The jaguar rarely kills more than one cow at a time. After he has made his kill, he drags the carcass into the nearest *mata* and proceeds to devour it at his leisure. You can always know where the jaguar is feeding by the swarm of buzzards that hover excitedly over his *mata.* Only after he has finished and gone away to enjoy his siesta do the buzzards dare even to perch on the nearby trees.

Some *llaneros* fight the jaguar on foot—with a *bayeton,* or thick woolen poncho, wrapped around the left arm as a shield, and a knife in the right hand. My father killed a jaguar in this manner. The beast will come at you with tremendous speed, but, nine times out of ten, on reaching you he will rise on his hind legs and try to grab you around the body and to crack your skull with his powerful jaws, aiming at the same time with his hind paws to rip your stomach open.

The most daring way of hunting the jaguar is by waiting for it with a raised lance which the hunter sinks, like a bayonet, into the brute's throat or breast when it rises to embrace him. The hunter holds the pawing jaguar at lance's length until it collapses or some one else gives it the *coup de grâce.*



AFTER my escape from Bogota and our brush with the Goajibo Indians near Caribabare, I finally arrived at the Tigre Ranch, east of Tame, where Campo Elias and three others of our men had been awaiting me. They had been sent by Valentin Perez to lead me to his hiding place on the shores of the Carcanaparo. They had everything in readiness for our dangerous trip across the hinterland of Arauca, inhabited only by jaguars and wild Indians. No road led across it, and the only signs we could guide ourselves by were the tracks of the last party that had happened to pass that way. The tracks were mostly obliterated by the rain and the drifting sand.

The bravest *llaneros* would not have ventured into those swampy savannas in groups of less than six or eight, and heavily armed, for the Indians there were of the worst—*bravos,* bad *hombres* to the last man. They shot poisoned arrows from ambush in the daytime, and slunk around at night, stealing on the sleeping *llaneros* to crack their skulls with their *macana* clubs.

In the daytime we had to be on the lookout for the smoke columns rising above the treetops or behind the horizon wherever Indians had set up a rancheria. Often we heard the rhythmical, weird beating of their *tambores*—the music of their log drums weaving strange rhythms with the mad shrieking of their reed pipes and the frenzied yells of the dancing warriors.

There was some consolation, however, as we rode past the camps with each eye looking in a different direction, regretting that we didn't have another in back of our heads, in the thought that the Goajibos were not cannibals, so that we were not likely to find our immortal souls in the soup. But we were in constant danger of being spiked by one of those enormous Goajibo arrows, with heads a foot and a half long, made of iron or fire tempered wood, and poisoned with *curare.* Their hunting arrows, of course, are not poisoned, but, since they did not wish to eat us, they would shoot at us with their poisoned ones.

Once, while we were scouting along the edge of the forest, in the state of Apure, one of our men got spiked in the hip bone with an iron pointed *lanceta.* As he did not become purple and die within a few minutes, we knew that, by mistake, he had been shot at with a hunting arrow. Following the flight of the missile backward, I discovered our Indian friend hiding among the top boughs of a mighty *ceiba.* He dived one hundred and eighty feet to Mother Earth with a bullet in his solar plexus. Then I turned to my medical duties.

It took half an hour and the combined efforts of the rest of us to pull the arrow out of our wounded comrade. We had to use an old pair of horseshoe pinchers, our only surgical instrument, which made the poor fellow shriek and kick like a wild steer, while five of us kept him pinned to the ground.

During the third and last night of our excursion, a terrible alarm threw our camp into confusion. As we had only enough grub left for that night's supper, and I disliked the idea of starting the next day on an empty stomach, I had picked up a fairly large turtle, about the size of a hat, and placed it next to our camp-fire—bottom up to keep it from running away. Early in the evening the Indians began getting ugly, probably because they feared that their prey might escape. They had been maneuvering queerly across the swamp, and we had fired several shots in their direction to scare them away. Nevertheless, we were dog tired and had to have some sleep, so we posted a sentry, hung up our hammocks and mosquito nets and turned in.

Along about three in the morning, the favorite hour of the Indians to make their surprise attacks, a blood curdling cry rent the air. The Indians were upon us, we thought. They must have sneaked up to our sentry, choked him, and were now on top of us . . .

We grabbed our guns and machetes and prepared to exchange our hides for as many Indian carcasses as possible—but there were no Indians out of whom we could make carcasses. The hair raising cries came from Manolo, the sentry, who, tired of standing up, had sat down—on top of the upturned turtle, which immediately grabbed him by the seat of his trousers.

After nosing around for awhile in the savannas of the State of Apure, we finally struck Valentin Perez's hiding place in a jungle clearing near the shores of the Arauca. But then the question arose, how to get our men back safely into Colombian territory? Gomez's mounted patrols were swarming all over the country, and we had very little ammunition left. To meet any of them in the open would have meant unavoidable disaster for us.

I eventually decided that the best of many dubious plans was to leave the savannas of Arauca and strike across country for the Carcanaparo plains, setting the prairies on fire behind us to keep the Gomez cavalry and sundry other vermin that had joined in the chase, as far away from us as possible.

To do that, we had to cross the lower Ily River, which is heavily wooded on both sides. I knew that by following a certain wire fence—the only one I have ever seen in that region—we would run into a little trail leading across the river jungle belts, sufficiently wide for horses to pass through in single file.

AS SOON as darkness came, we started following the fence and, after two hours, reached the beginning of the trail. There I left our men behind and went ahead with Campo Elias to explore the trail with a couple of lighted candles—it might have been rendered useless by quagmires. After following the trail for awhile we struck the river, which was very narrow at that point and very shallow. We were discussing how to proceed, when a bulky object dropped from the tree beneath which we were standing. It smelled as if it did not take salt with its meat and, sure enough, when it scrambled to its feet it turned out to be a gigantic Indian warrior, holding in one hand a long bow and a batch of *lancetas,* in the other a fearful *macana* war club. He was the chief of one of the numerous Indian bands in the pay of Gomez's government, and addressed us in deep guttural accents and in defective Spanish more or less in this manner:

"How, ha! I am Cacique Oahu. Have you seen Nogales-El Tigre? We have been waiting for him here since sunset."

We had fallen into an ambush, and the slightest blunder would have meant dozens of poisoned arrows whizzing through the darkness. I replied, in the tone of a weary and indifferent seeker, while I lighted a cigaret with my candle:

"Nogales—El Tigre, you say? We too have been chasing him all day and we saw him enter this jungle. He can't be far off."

Then, speaking to Campo Elias, who was grinning and enjoying the situation thoroughly, I told him to fetch our squadron while I had further talk with the Cacique. Campo turned and walked away slowly as if he were tired of pursuing this man Nogales on false scents for so many days.

Campo Elias had not been out of sight half a minute when the leaves began to rustle violently all around me and the Indians began to appear, apparently ready for business. There was no time to lose.

I drew quickly and pushed the muzzle of my cocked six-shooter into the Cacique's ribs. Then I lifted the candle high and shouted:

"As soon as an arrow pierces me my gun will go off. It will go off whether I want it to or not—and I want it to. I am Nogales-El Tigre!"

The two or three minutes that elapsed before I heard my men rushing through the brush, I shall never forget. During those slow seconds I experienced what has been, perhaps, the only real adventure of my life.

It was a deeply satisfying sensation to have dozens of poisoned arrows leveled at me, with nervous fingers pulling back the strings of the bows, and yet to be able to laugh a man in the face and hold him powerless.

At sight of my men the Indians scattered, vanishing like shadows into the darkness, silently, with only the subtle sound of moving foliage. We took the Cacique with us, and after we had crossed the river and reached the open savannas, I borrowed a dozen cigaret boxes from my men and offered them to the astonished Indian, as compensation for the trouble which we had to put him to.

Then I gave him a hearty handshake and turned him loose. It is good policy never to kill unless you have to, especially in Indian country, where the news of a killing travels faster than the news of a knockout blow in the United States. And I had already enough troubles on my hands trying to reach the Colombian frontier in safety.

This we finally achieved by setting fire to the savannas for a hundred miles around and keeping to the dim trails.

A few days later my sudden disappearance was reported in the Caracas papers, including the *Universal*, the official government organ, which regretted "the tragic death of General de Nogales, one of the bravest, etc, who had perished, fighting valiantly, by the poisoned arrows of the Goajibo Indians, among whom he had gone to found an empire of his own!"

But what appeared to me almost as tragic as my death—although it had its element of humor too—was that after I had disbanded my men in Colombian territory, bidding them a hearty farewell (until the following year!) I ran into one of the Colombian mounted patrols that were scouring the country for me. At San Rafael de los Llanos I could hear their bugles calling other patrols to their aid, as they drew a close circle about me.

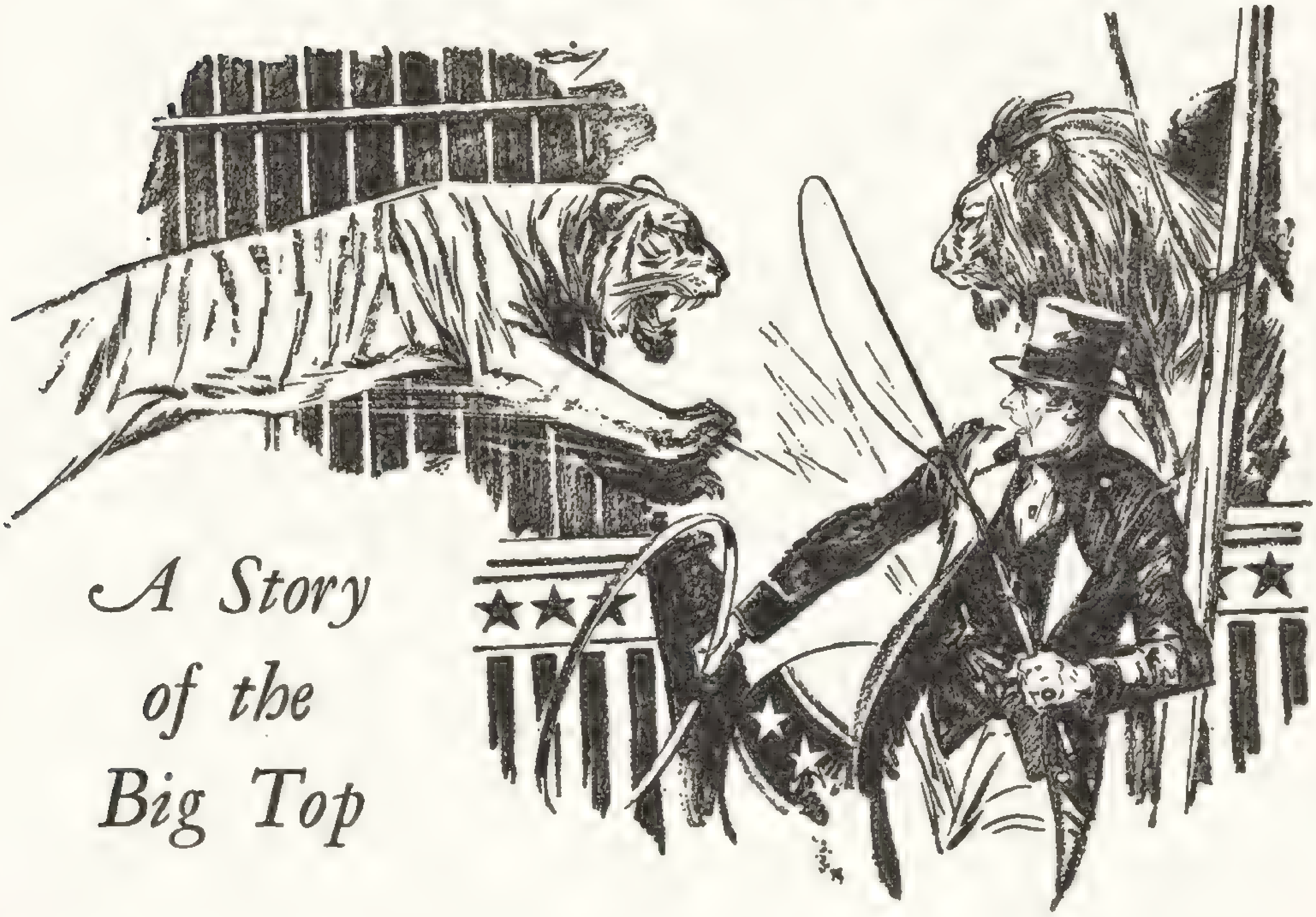
To escape from them, I was compelled to retrace my steps and ride back alone, with a reserve horse galloping at my side, over the same jaguar and Indian infested trail which several weeks before I had followed down with Campo Elias and the rest of my escort. I rode from sunrise till sunset, changing horses every half hour, trotting and galloping alternately, and so managed to slip past the Indians and arrive late that night at the Tigre Ranch, near Tame, from which we had started in search of Valentin Perez.

When Nieto and his punchers saw me arrive alone, they thought they were witnessing my ghost. They would not believe that I had made the trip all alone, and in one day, until a week later, when some of my men, who had followed my tracks, arrived and convinced them that such was the case.

When the country was reported clear of patrols, I rode back into the Cordillera and, following more respectable routes, went first to Bogota, where I was very well received, every one half closing an eye and asking few questions. For the Colombians are gentlemen who know that it is honorable to overlook certain infringements of the law.

BLACK PRINCE

By FRANCIS BEVERLY KELLEY



A Story of the Big Top

IN RIDGE CITY they remember a certain September 2nd as the day when a black maned Nubian lion was shot down in the main street.

Keller's Kolossal Circus billed Black Prince as a man killer, and he looked the part. His huge brown body, shading to black in the great mane, his saber-like dental equipment, curved claws and blazing amber eyes presented a most formidable appearance. But that was as far as he lived up to the advertising. At heart, Black Prince was a giant, dog-like creature who roared like a crazed monarch of the veld during the wild animal act in the steel performing arena, but purred with the intensity of a great engine when his trainer stroked his majestic head.

Lucky Davis had raised Black Prince from cubhood after the death of his mother. Lions, if left to their own designs, are apt to breed far too frequently in captivity. That was what happened in Black Prince's family; and upon the occasion of his birth, two sisters and a brother died with the mother lioness.

But Davis, the premier wild animal subjugator with Keller's Kolossal, decided to save the strongest cub that remained alive in the closed cage that had been Queen's during the period of her fatal confinement. In spite of widespread derision among his associates, Davis gave the cub to a female goat. Much to the surprise of all the wild animal attendants, the goat accepted the whimpering ball of fur.

In the weeks that followed, circus spectators stopped in front of a certain cage in the wild animal tent to marvel at the goat and her adopted baby. Press agents wrote columns about the strange pair and the circus people admitted that Lucky Davis had been lucky again—this time in saving the life of an orphaned lion cub instead of barely escaping death from the claws and teeth of a full grown circus cat in the performing den. Davis had more scars on his body than a leopard has spots. Nevertheless, there was little temerity in his methods.

"There's no such thing as a tamed wild animal," he maintained. "You can train 'em, but you never can be sure they're tamed. Taking chances with tigers and lions is like asking for a one-way ticket to eternity. The law of averages will get you enough bites and scratches."

So ran Lucky Davis' circus wild animal philosophy. But his assistants and attendants all knew that he made an exception to his rules of caution. The exception was Black Prince.

The circus was nearing the end of its season when the young lion was weaned from his foster-mother, so Davis took Black Prince to his New England home and kept him there until late in January, when the training began at circus Winter quarters in the South. Black Prince dozed peacefully on top of the icebox in the Davis kitchen, much to the consternation of newly employed ice carriers, who usually dropped their cargo in the middle of the kitchen floor and hurried away. Young as he was that Winter, Black Prince was an imposing fellow perched on the lid of the chest.

In January Davis and his lion departed for circus Winter quarters. Training of wild animals usually begins then, and Davis always had new cats to break to the acts. Those who understand the warm natures of some animals can imagine the joy of the goat at seeing her stepchild, as well as the ardent purring that marked Black Prince's arrival at the cat barn where he could have the goat in the same cage with him once a day.

This companionship persisted until one day a new and inexperienced animal attendant put the goat in the wrong cage. This den was occupied by a lioness and her cub, an animal about the same size as Black Prince. Now goats and zebra are a natural jungle diet for lions and tigers, and no sooner had the goat been placed inside the cage and the door bolted when the lioness sprang upon Black Prince's foster-mother, crushing out her life by breaking the spine in true leonine fashion. Black Prince, through the bars of his cage next door, saw everything and was powerless to interfere.

Then and there a savagery crept into his puppy-like nature. So wild was he at seeing the goat destroyed that wild animal keepers were afraid to go into his cage to clean it. For a week they pushed his meals in to him with a long cage scraper, and only Davis dared go near the beast.

The Winter quarters season drew to an end. Brightly painted wagons glittered in the sun. New canvas had arrived. The costume shop was a beehive of energy and a riot of color as dressmakers strove to get ready the pageant equipment for the opening of the show in late April. Black Prince lifted sensitive nostrils and drank in the aroma of Spring.

Vaguely he sensed what it meant. Nomadic wandering on the winding trail of the big tops. Circus wagons rumbling through deserted city streets at dawn. Odor of clean straw in the cages on cool nights and the altogether strange aroma of hot coffee from the cookhouse. Cold, muddy nights with a scant, shivering crowd pausing at the cages in the menagerie; windy nights with the big top heaving and flapping like a gigantic gray ghost. Pleasant nights with thousands thronging the midway. Sturdy teams and sleepy drivers following the flaming beacons placed on street corners to guide them from the lot to the railroad loading point. Stars twinkling in the celestial big top.

Black Prince grew to splendid proportions during his second season on the road. He remained docile with Davis, but in his stout young heart remained a smoldering hatred for the murderer of his foster-mother. When the circus season had passed through July, Lucky Davis introduced Black Prince to his classroom—the steel performing arena, a large circular cage in the center of the main tent.

NOW there are three distinct stages in the preparation of finished wild animal acts: breaking, training and working. The initial step in the education of an unbroken lion or tiger is to teach him that while the trainer has power over him, he need not fear that trainer unnecessarily. When the snarling, unbroken beast first springs through the delivery door at the end of the long runs connecting the performing cage with the exhibition dens, he finds himself alone with the trainer. Often the animal goes for the man, only to connect in midair with an ordinary kitchen chair. The chair is the trainer's best protection and the cat slowly realizes that in that weapon lies a strange power that prevents him from coming in actual contact with the man.

When the beast tires of the attack, the trainer, with gentle touches of the whip, works the animal toward a low pedestal. In its efforts to avoid the trainer, the animal leaps upon the stand and the first lesson has been learned. Thereafter, he is taught to take his seat the moment he enters the cage. As long as he does this he is not molested.

Then the actual training begins, following which the newly broken and trained beast is let into an arena with other animals—sometimes animals of his own kind and often mixed groups of lions, tigers, leopards, pumas and other beasts which are natural enemies and which he must learn to tolerate. The working stage in the training of wild animals is the actual presentation of the act.

Black Prince proved a model pupil in the early stages of his education. So complete had been his rearing under Davis' careful methods that he was entirely past the breaking stage before he entered the great cage. He learned tricks quickly, too, and soon was ready to take his place in a big lion act with twelve other cats. Davis rehearsed the group between shows one hot afternoon in Texas and he didn't anticipate any trouble with his model pupil. One of the attendants, joking with him while the arena was being prepared, said:

"Bad business, Lucky, going in there with thirteen cats. Unlucky number, you know."

Davis grinned.

"Yeah, I know all about your jinx number; but say, Prince isn't just another lion. He's almost human. More like another man in there than a cat."

"Sure," replied the other man. "I know he's a fine cat, but don't forget he's still a cat after all. Every one of 'em has his bad days."

The cage was ready and one by one twelve male and female lions crept into the arena on soft padded feet. Silently they took their places on small seats—small because an animal on a pedestal barely large enough to accommodate him is not in a good position to spring upon his trainer if he has a mind to do so.

"All right, Pinky, let him in," called the trainer.

The door to the delivery runs clicked, and Black Prince, already as large as many full grown males in the cage, bounded through the runs. Into the great den he came, but not to take his seat around the outside rim of the arena. Instead, he sprang without ceremony upon a lioness near the entrance through which he had just come. Taking her entirely unawares, in a disadvantageous position atop a small pedestal, Black Prince bore her to earth and ripped open her belly with one sweeping stroke of his huge paw. In another instant his jaws found her neck and the battle was over.

By this time other beasts in the arena had become uneasy and three had left their seats to join in the fight, but were driven back by Davis, who was far too busy trying to quiet the rest of the animals to interfere with Black Prince. Now that his enemy—for she it was who slew his goat foster-mother—lay dead, the young lion lifted a bloody face and emitted a deep, throaty roar; then he calmly walked to his pedestal and jumped upon it.

But rehearsal was over for the day. With difficulty the animals were driven into the delivery runs. So accustomed are trained wild beasts to leaving the performing cage only at the conclusion of their act, that it is hard to make them leave at any other time during the routine. Black Prince was the last to quit the cage. Despite advice from those outside the den to "stay away from that killer!" Davis remained to examine a few minor scratches on his pet's face. The trainer had witnessed his lion's great grief and loneliness since the goat's death, and somehow could not bring himself to punish Black Prince now that the account was squared.

"It'll be pretty tough to square you with the boss, old-timer, but maybe he'll let me make a fighting cat out of you," mused Davis as he sent Black Prince back to his exhibition den. Then, turning to an attendant, he asked, "Did you say there were thirteen lions in this act?"

And that is how the best natured animal in a twelve-lion act happened to be billed as a man killer—a snarling, death dealing denizen of the African jungles, fearing only the daredevil wild animal subjugator, Captain Jim Davis!

Davis taught Black Prince to "fight", as one animal in each lion act frequently is coached to fight. The beast first is taught to paw at the bars of the safety cage and apparently refuse to let his trainer enter the den. Once inside, the trainer appears to risk his life in warding off the tawny antagonist, who repeatedly snarls and paws at him until the explosion of a revolver loaded with blanks finally drives him to his pedestal.

This "fighting" continues at intervals throughout the act and usually terminates when the trainer makes a quick exit from the cage a step ahead of the "man killer", who literally chases him out and stands on his hind legs pawing at the bars while the band plays the finish chord and the trainer bows low to an admiring audience.

Teaching wild animals to fight in the performing arena is justifiable when one considers that the public simply will not believe the truth about wild animal education anyway. For example, it is not possible to dope wild animals successfully; yet thousands of spectators stoutly maintain that the trainer dopes his beasts to render them harmless.

Others believe that trainers hypnotize their charges by staring at them—a pretty theory until one wonders what all the other animals are doing while the trainer is busy staring one beast in the eye! Often the silent, apparently gentle, lion or tiger is the real villain in the drama of the steel arena, treacherously awaiting a chance to attack the trainer from behind when he is busy with another animal.

Black Prince and Lucky Davis remained the best of friends. In fact, the trainer almost spoiled his pet lion with attention, and Black Prince reciprocated by never causing him any trouble in the circus classroom—at least after the hated lioness had been disposed of. Then one day it happened.

BLACK PRINCE was four years old. Davis loved the beast so much and trusted him so implicitly that he failed to take into account the fact that jealousy can become a dangerously potent force in animal nature. During Winter quarters training season the previous year, Davis had broken a mixed group of lions and Royal Bengal tigers. Now tigers are all cat and decidedly more treacherous than are lions. Davis, however, had one huge female that showed rare promise as an actress. He taught her to ride a turntable and to leap through a hoop of fire from one tall pedestal to another while he stood beneath, holding the hoop. This trick was learned only after a long, tedious process.

First, the animal was carefully taught to leap a short distance from one pedestal to another. Gradually the distance was increased until she jumped ten feet without difficulty. Then the trainer crouched beneath as the animal executed the jump, and the tiger, her single-track mind intent upon reaching the other pedestal, did not notice the man underneath her as she sprang through space.

Day by day, Davis stood a little higher until he could rise to his full height as the splendid striped monster sprang over him. Soon a very large hoop was introduced and the animal took no notice of it, because it was far too large to impede the jump. A little later, a small amount of fire was added, and while this worried the tiger during the initial rehearsal, the fire soon was a familiar sight blazing away on the circular rim of the hoop. Then the hoop was made smaller very gradually until it barely permitted the tigress to pass through and the desired effect was created—a beautiful belle of the Indian jungle leaping from one tall pedestal to another, passing en route through a hoop of fire barely big enough to accommodate the passage of the huge beast.

This trick, along with other nerve racking education necessary to prepare the prize tigress for the act, required so much time that Davis unconsciously neglected Black Prince, and the huge Nubian knew he was being slighted. As the attention that his god was accustomed to shower upon him grew less and less, Black Prince became nervous and irritable. His "fighting" in the performing cage often was a listless affair, while at other times he seemed to battle with almost natural ferocity that startled every one but the trainer.

Like a loving father, Davis was the last to admit that his pet lion's disposition had undergone any decided change. Then one day Black Prince tried to attack the tigress as the animals were leaving the arena. For this, Davis was obliged to give him a mild beating. Later, between shows, he tried to fondle the Nubian, but Black Prince remained indifferent. How should Davis know that he fairly reeked of the hated tigress whom he had been petting previous to his visit to Black Prince's cage?

That night in the steel arena the Nubian's fighting grew more realistic as the act progressed. Davis little realized that every time he made a move to pet or reassure the new striped actress, Black Prince's stout heart was torn in brute agony.

Time came for the conclusion of the act. The Bengal leaped through the hoop of fire, posed atop the tall pedestal, a beautiful study of orange and black there in the spotlight. Davis bowed. Black Prince, true to his cue, leaped from his pedestal and sprang toward his trainer. But this time there wasn't any affection for the man lurking in the blazing eyes. Instead, there was only cold hatred. One giant paw, claws extended, tore at the trainer's white uniform and ripped away his shirt front. Blood ran from a badly scratched chest as Lucky Davis bowed his way to the dressing tent.

Back in the steel arena, Black Prince was a raging maniac. Something had snapped in his brain, and he was once more a primitive beast, roaring and pawing at the bars of the cage, fighting an imaginary enemy, frightening the crowd who doubted that the steel den could long withstand the mad rushes of the murder bent Nubian.

Davis sat in the doctor's tent. A wet dressing was being applied to the wound. Circus doctors never cauterize a wound inflicted by a cat animal, because infection lurks in the claws and saber-like teeth of these beasts. The dressing was nearing completion when the owner of the show stepped beneath the canopy.

"How about it, Davis? Badly hurt?"

"It's nothing, Mr. Keller. I'll work tomorrow all right," responded the trainer.

The showman frowned.

"I don't think you're going to like what I have to say, but that lion's out of the act from now on. He's gone crazy."

Davis felt faint.

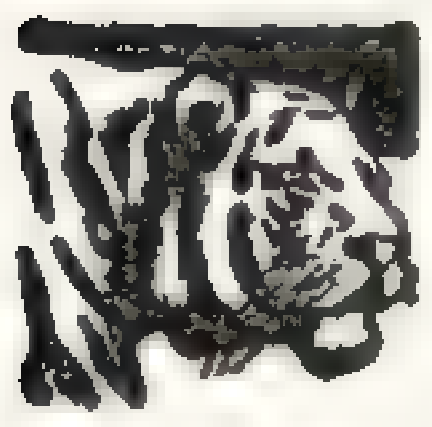
"I don't think that's necessary, sir. Prince is only on a temporary spree. He must have had a headache tonight. He never did anything like this before. I can handle him—"

"Sorry, Davis. I know you think a lot of him, but the season's about over and I don't feel like taking too many chances. I don't want you hurt on your own account, and besides that I don't want to have to scrap that cat act if you get laid up for good. We can dispense with the fighting finish to the act. There's plenty of thrill in that tiger jump to satisfy the customers. After we get to Winter quarters you can try working on Black Prince if you want to. Maybe you can bring him around, but he looks to me like a cat that's gone crazy for good."

"Why, sir, he's as docile as a kitten most of the time," replied Davis.

"Yeah, I've noticed that. You've been so busy with that new tiger that you've not noticed how peculiar your pet lion's been acting lately. Anyhow, he's out of the act for the rest of the season. Sorry."

So Black Prince was relegated to the confines of his exhibition den, where he sulked and refused to respond to friendly overtures from his trainer or anybody else.



SEPTEMBER came and the circus was winding its way through the Southwest. On September 2nd, in Ridge City, a huge crowd jammed Keller's big top at the matinée performance. The pageant was over and the equestrian director's shrill whistle signaled the beginning of the wild animal act. A low, weird selection rose from the bandstand as sleek, treacherous tigers and lions slunk through the delivery runs to the great steel barred circle, lighted with the crimson glow of jungle fires.

The tiger prima donna, Sheba, had a headache. A rough run on the railroad from the preceding town and too warm surroundings during a long haul from the unloading point to the show grounds had combined to produce an ugly temper. With extreme reluctance she rode the turntable. When she was summoned to the leap through the fire hoop she uttered a deep throated snarl.

Thirty yards away, in the wild animal tent, Black Prince heard the snarl and started pacing up and down in his cage. In a wild animal circus, the cages are placed end to end so that when the doors are opened the beasts have a long passageway through the cages to the connecting delivery runs and the steel arena. Black Prince's cage was the last in line. Although more than a month had passed since Black Prince had ceased to be an actor in the performing arena, his cage was still connected with the others in line because half of this den was occupied by two females that participated in the act.

Inside the performing arena, Sheba was poised for her leap. Fire smoldered in her feverish brain. Her legs suddenly went weak. Great amber eyes gazed through the blazing ring to the pedestal on the other side. Then she sprang.

Her jump was inches short of the other pedestal, and a shout escaped the crowd of spectators as the tigress fell back upon her trainer who was holding the hoop between the pedestals. Blind with confusion and rage, the Bengal started tearing at the trainer as he slipped to one knee. Stinging powder and blinding flash from the trainer's revolver failed to divert the tigress from her terrible attack. Davis was flat on his back now, protecting his face with one arm, but in poor position to protect himself effectively from the beast. Attendants outside the arena prodded Sheba with long steel poles, but to no avail. Other animals in the steel den were leaving their pedestals to investigate the affair in the center of the cage.

A loud roar rolled like jungle thunder from the menagerie tent. The stricken trainer heard it and shouted hoarsely:

"Get Prince! Black Prince! Let him in here, I tell you!"

"Black Prince!" The order went ringing through the connection, relayed by attendants along the delivery runs. In an instant the door of the Nubian's cage was open and he raced through the long line of wild animal cages and into the delivery runs. The delivery door was open and the lion sprang into the den. A moment later he was upon the tigress, diverting her attention from her trainer, tearing at her with long, sweeping strokes. Attendants dragged Davis into the safety cage while the mortal combat between lion and tiger continued.

A tiger can outfight a lion nine times out of ten chiefly because tigers go into battle with both front feet flying, while lions are content to fight with but one huge paw, using the other for purposes of balance. So unless the tiger becomes careless and allows its claws to become tangled in the lion's great mane, the striped combatant wins the fight. Black Prince instinctively knew he was no match for the giant, satanic Bengal. Already her terrible teeth and claws had opened great gashes in his sides.

At last he eluded her long enough to make a quick survey of the cage, Davis was gone. Vaguely realizing in his limited brain that the thing he had come to do was accomplished, the Nubian made one bound for the delivery gate and the attendant quickly lifted the steel door. Click! It was down again before Sheba could follow.

A system of blocking off sections of the runs allows one animal to go through by itself and be locked safely in its cage before others are given free passage. But in the confusion an inexperienced animal man unloosed the ropes that held two sections in place, thus leaving an insecure connection and a gap in the runs. Blind with blood running into his eyes and still maddened from the death battle, Black Prince forced his way through the opening into the freedom of the circus lot.

Once outside, he was completely bewildered and started running as every one in his path swiftly made way for him.

Within ten minutes half the town knew there was an escaped lion somewhere. Not just an escaped lion—a real man killer! It said so on his cage and there was no mistaking the black maned monarch with his pictures hanging in half the town's store windows.

An armed posse answered a hysterical phone call from a woman who said there was a lion trying to break through her back door. From a safe vantage point in a neighboring window, they fired at Black Prince as he lay licking his wounds. A bullet stung his flank and he bounded off the porch, between a house and garage and down a side street. One block away was the main thoroughfare. Past a line of deserted store fronts slunk the lion, until a police officer sent a bullet through his brain.

The red wagons have been rolling a good many years now since that eventful September 2nd, and Captain Jim Davis works a new generation of lions and tigers in the steel arena of a now greater circus. But every year when the nomadic legions of the big tops spread their city of tents in Ridge City, a man emerges from the dressing tent toward the end of the matinée performance and walks up a high hill half a mile from the show grounds. He approaches the base of a giant rock, where a mound of earth marks a curious grave. Here lies Black Prince, best beloved of cats. Silently the man stands there, and from the distance come the strains of music. Under the billowing big tops the afternoon performance is over. The band plays "Auld Lang Syne."

Strange Adventures of the Newsreel Men —by One of Them

Hunting Whales off Kamchatka

By CHARLES PEDEN

WHALES always prove to be an interesting subject for newsreels, and when Ariel Varges recounted his experiences while hunting the big mammals I thought it would be a good yarn to pass along. We were dallying over cocktails in the exquisite lobby of the Hotel Imperial, Tokyo, when my partner mentioned the subject.

"Plenty of grief on that story," remarked Paul Heise, Varges' partner.

"Just how did you get it?" I asked.

"To begin with," obliged Varges, "it was a tough trip up to the place where we were to board the whaling ship. The Toyo Hogei Company—which incidentally is the only whaling outfit in the Orient—invited us to make pictures of their industry up at Toshimo. They advised us to get in the district about August, it being the best month for results, as the whales leave their Northern breeding grounds at that time and migrate to the waters off Kamchatka.

"Our first step was to drive the length of Honshu to Aormi, the most northerly port of consequence; at that point we chartered a transport plane for the flight to Fukuyama, Hokkaido. Up to that area conveniences are few and far between so it became necessary to exchange the more modern vehicles of transportation for horseback. The next six days were spent in crossing wild country; the hills, rivers, and lack of good roads, cut us down to a scant ten miles a day. Three weeks after our start we reached the shores of Furefo Bay where a small sampan waited to carry us through the Sea of Okhotsk to Toshimo. We arrived to find the whaling season in full swing; several boats had returned with lucrative catches.

"Going into action right away, we shot a lot of footage on the more commercial side of the great industry. The Japanese primarily hunt whales for their meat; it is palatable flesh not unlike venison, and has no trace of fish flavor about it. The meat is cut and packed to be shipped throughout the Empire. Some is iced and the rest canned. Oil, whalebone or baleen, and a sort of leather are the valuable by-products of the industry.

"We found lots of film material in the activities around the slaughter houses.

Men, naked save for loin cloths, were busily engaged in slicing the huge carcasses into convenient chunks. Chattering away in a patois half Jap and Russian, the chunky brown workers resembled monkeys as they clambered over the bodies. Using a long, double edged knife, they sawed and sliced away, making transverse incisions into the mountains of flesh; slabs of meat weighing an even hundred pounds were thus obtained.

"As a matter of news interest, it is left to the women to busy themselves with the nastiest job. Namely, the disposal of the viscera. Over two hundred feet of intestine can be acquired from one whale and this tough substance makes an excellent leather substitute.

"Over at another part of the plant we made some close-ups of the methods used in procuring oil from the sperm or cachalot whale. The oil, or spermaceti, as it is commercially known, is drained off from the reservoir-like head of the mammal. It is then shipped to refineries where it is clarified into a super lubricant for precision machinery. As a matter of fact it is excellent for cameras.

"Quite satisfied with the results achieved up to that time, we expressed a desire to go to sea with one of the whalers for the purpose of making the first actual sound pictures of a whale hunt. Our host, who was also the manager of the station, made every polite effort to dissuade us. 'American-san would find it of much difficult and unhappy conveniences to sail on honolable ship,' was his droll way of conveying his well intentioned forebodings. We finally won our point however, and with much tongue clucking and hissings, he led us aboard the *Ganjitsu-Maru*, flagship of the whaling fleet. The captain, with true Japanese hospitality, turned his quarters over to us, removing his personal *tatomi* mats and duffle to another part of the ship.

"The following morning we weighed anchor and, after skirting the island of Etorufo, we headed for the restless waters of the North Pacific. I've sailed some rough seas in my day, but those wastes off Kamchatka take the cake. It must be where all those Japanese typhoons you read about originate. For sixteen days we tossed and pitched through mountainous seas of angry green water. Our craft dug right in like the good vessel she was and shed the water like a duck. Despite the month, August, it was cold, for we were on a line with the Aleuts. Whales are rarely found below the fiftieth parallel, and it was when we were in that area our skipper informed us that the game might be sighted momentarily.

"A study of the vessel revealed that the deck head of the pilot house offered the best location for the camera. I set it up, lashing the tripod legs to rail stanchions. Paul hooked up his amplifier and batteries just aft of my position, and after fussing around for a good microphone placement—the gusty wind tended to set the diaphragm clicking—he suspended the unit from the foremast, first having wrapped it up with several layers of Fuji silk. Waiting patiently, we scanned the expanse of restless water for a trace of the mammals. The lookout ripped out a string of guttural sentences, finishing with a high pitched shriek It was the Japanese equivalent of our own New Bedford whalers, 'Thar she blows!'

"Fastening my eyes on the spot his outstretched arm indicated, I caught the spout of the whale; I could even hear its swish above the roar of the wind. The giant body lay just awash in a long, undulating line. With a flick of monster flukes, the mammal disappeared for a spell, then came to the surface for another blow. The column of water shot fully thirty feet into the air. Our skipper stepped in at this point and ordered the chase. The helmsman spun the wheel hard over. The decks of the whaler were alive with the sturdy fishermen as they scrambled hither and thither to their respective stations. Up forward, with feet braced to counteract the pitch of the boat, was the master harpooner. He snapped out orders to his assistants as they coiled the slender harpoon rope for the pay-out.

"I made close-ups of him as he adjusted the Norwegian Svend Foyn harpoon gun. This gun shoots a six-foot iron dart weighing one hundred and ten pounds. Contained in its head is a small powder charge which detonates four seconds after striking. Foot by foot we crept closer to the unsuspecting leviathan; the bow of the ship was bobbing and diving so badly I wondered how the marksman could ever draw a sight. When we were within thirty feet of the game, the harpooner galvanized into action. Bang! went the gun, and the line snaked after the missile. It was a bull's-eye.

"MR. WHALE departed to subterranean depths in great surprise. The line fairly smoked as it slithered over the gunwale. Switching to a six-inch lens, I waited for the whale's reappearance. Fully half a mile of rope must have been paid out before the game broke water. Now the captain took over the wheel and began to play the whale. It is done in the same manner your proficient Izaak Walton lands a fish, but a steam winch is used instead of a smooth clicking reel.

"Our game's struggles became more spasmodic now, due no doubt to the lethal qualities of the powder explosion, and he took time out to rest. When we were within two hundred feet of him he made one supreme effort to break loose. Up and down he dived, flailing away like the maddened brute he was. The end came suddenly, for after one final blow with his gigantic flukes he blew a feeble spout of blood flecked water, then gave up.

"From our proximity it was apparent the catch was a splendid specimen of blue whale, the *shironagasu-kujira* of the Japanese.

"A small, square sterned tender put out with a working crew, and I photographed it as a single man dexterously sculled it toward the dead monster. A hawser was slipped around the portion of the body just forward of the flukes for towing purposes. The harpoon was extricated from the carcass and a long steel shaft bearing the house flag of the Toyo Hogei Company was planted atop the whale.

"Everything shipshape, we got under way to join the other ships at a rendezvous, where the catch was turned over to a mooring ship that we might pursue other whales unimpeded. With very little time wasted we were back on the job prepared to 'cut in' other whales. A week of this resulted in the capture of three beauties, one of which measured over seventy feet from tip to tail. The harpooner estimated its weight at better than sixty tons.

"Things went pretty smoothly for awhile, and we took advantage of the interlude to clean up our equipment. The salt water had corroded everything. It was while so engaged one afternoon that the skipper came upon us and began to jabber away excitedly. The cause for his outburst was a terrific commotion astern. A school of killer whales were rushing a lone mother and baby of another species. You think a shark is a tough customer? Well, you want to see a pack of killers go into action. They really are the wolves of the sea, and a whale would rather tackle anything in preference to an encounter with these overgrown dolphins, for that is all they really are. They run about thirty feet long, are gracefully proportioned, and unmatched for ferocity.

"I ran for my camera, setting up aft in an effort to get the fight. Unfortunately, the distance required a telephoto lens and, due to the motion of the boat, its small field could not hold in the fighters. Fascinated, we watched the one sided combat. The baby was soon dispatched, and then the infuriated mother went for the killers. She rushed and rammed the attackers time and again. They ripped in and out like lightning, tearing great strips from her body. It is a favorite trick of the killers to get a bite on the jaw of the victim, then twist their own bodies rapidly, thus completely shearing the jawbone off the opponent. In a few minutes the fight was over and nothing but the torn carcass of the cow remained to mark the scene of the struggle.

"We headed southward once more and managed to harpoon another big fellow. It was a finback, with a rich growth of whalebone in its mouth. I shot some of the detail concerned with handling this type of whale, then packed the camera away, as every foot of film had been exposed. Now normally one would consider the job concluded, and so far as the office was concerned it was, but our public doesn't realize how near they came to not seeing that picture."

"How come?" we asked in unison.

"Just this. After rejoining the fleet, we took our five whales in tow and started for the base. Our headway was slow due to the heavy load, and it was a week before we raised the rocky outline of Kamchatka Peninsula. Coming topside the next morning, I noticed the sea was very glassy and overhead the clouds were quite feathery. In those waters, mare's tail clouds generally portend hurricane weather, and for verification I went forward to study the glass. It was well down, and I noticed the skipper's concern. He viewed the barometer speculatively, and referred to chart after chart.

"As the hours passed the air assumed an ominous calm, and slowly but surely nimbus clouds began to blacken the horizon. My mind went back to the hours preceding the great Tokyo disaster when just such a calm befell the city before the tidal wave swept forward to reap its harvest of destruction. Paul joined me on the bridge, and I agreed with him when he commented on the nasty weather that seemed inevitable. The sun had disappeared, but a ghastly, pale glow bathed the sea in its weird light; a faint breeze came from the starboard quarter; on its trail was wafted the scent of burning joss.

"Paul and I looked at each other meaningly. It was evident that our crew were also concerned about the weather, for they had lighted incense to appease heathen gods. Superstition or not, the bosun rousted out his hands and directed them to get busy. Hatches were battened down and the decks cleared of all loose gear. Whitecaps began to fleck the surface and a stiff breeze whipped across our bow; it muttered and whinnied through the rigging with ever increasing volume. Great billows surged crosswise to us, and one found its mark. With a sickening lurch the *Ganjitsu-Maru* heeled to starboard and the rails disappeared beneath the avalanche of water; it sloughed over the hatches and raced down the scuppers, carrying loose gear in its course.

"A thoughtful seaman came running with oilskins, and from the security of a leeward hatchway we watched the storm. Sea after sea of angry green water pounded the ship as the full fury of the gale fell upon us. It was hard going, for the dead weight of the whales retarded us a great deal. At times we stood still, hampered by load and wind.

"Nightfall descended, but there was no abatement in the storm; if anything its power increased. For fear of running aground, the course was materially changed, and this put the wind abeam. The pitching now changed to terrifying rolling, and the rain beat down from all sides, ousting us from our post as the drops struck with the impact of lead pellets. Down below we found the cabin a shambles. Our gear had broken loose and it was strewn all over the place. We crawled on hands and knees to collect it together and, listening to the beams retch and groan as they worked, we wondered if the ship might founder. The continual motion of the vessel and malodorous atmosphere of the interior began to have its effect and we both, though normally good sailors, fell ill. You've never seen two more miserable men. Heise alternated his groans with cries for a little dry land, and I fervently seconded his desires.

"All through the night we plunged and bucked. Sometime along about halfway through the middle watch we heard a clamor and scuffle on deck. Thinking that perhaps the end had come, we struggled up the ladder to see what the racket was all about. In the rays of a sputtering acetylene torch we could see the crew struggling to sever the ropes holding the whales. The skipper explained that their weight threatened to drag us shoreward within range of the rocky shoals that bordered the coast. One by one the ropes were cut, severing with a report like that of a rifle shot. Upon the last line being let go, a gratifying improvement in riding was apparent.

"Seven bells saw the backbone of the gale broken, and by four bells of the morning watch a beam of light slanted through a cock's eye in the raising clouds. Wrapping ourselves in *futon* quilts, we dropped to the deck of the cabin for a rest, but our hopes were shattered. Some of the crew—no doubt as a token to the storm gods—unearthed a couple of those banjo-like *samisens* and, to their twangy, monotonous discords, they struck up the inevitable chant they call music. For hours we had to listen to it:

"'*Ya-ra-ku-ra-sa! Ya-ra-ku-ra-sa . . .*'

"They sang incessantly, never varying the inflection. We must have fallen asleep, for it was late afternoon when we stepped out on deck again. Imagine our surprise upon seeing two of the dead whales in tow again and a third in sight. For those hunters are a crafty lot! You see the reason for the house flag being stuck atop the carcass—so they can readily locate the lost prizes and retrieve them. By noon all five of our catch were in tow once more and it was a matter of but another day before we warped alongside the pier at the Toshimo whaling station.

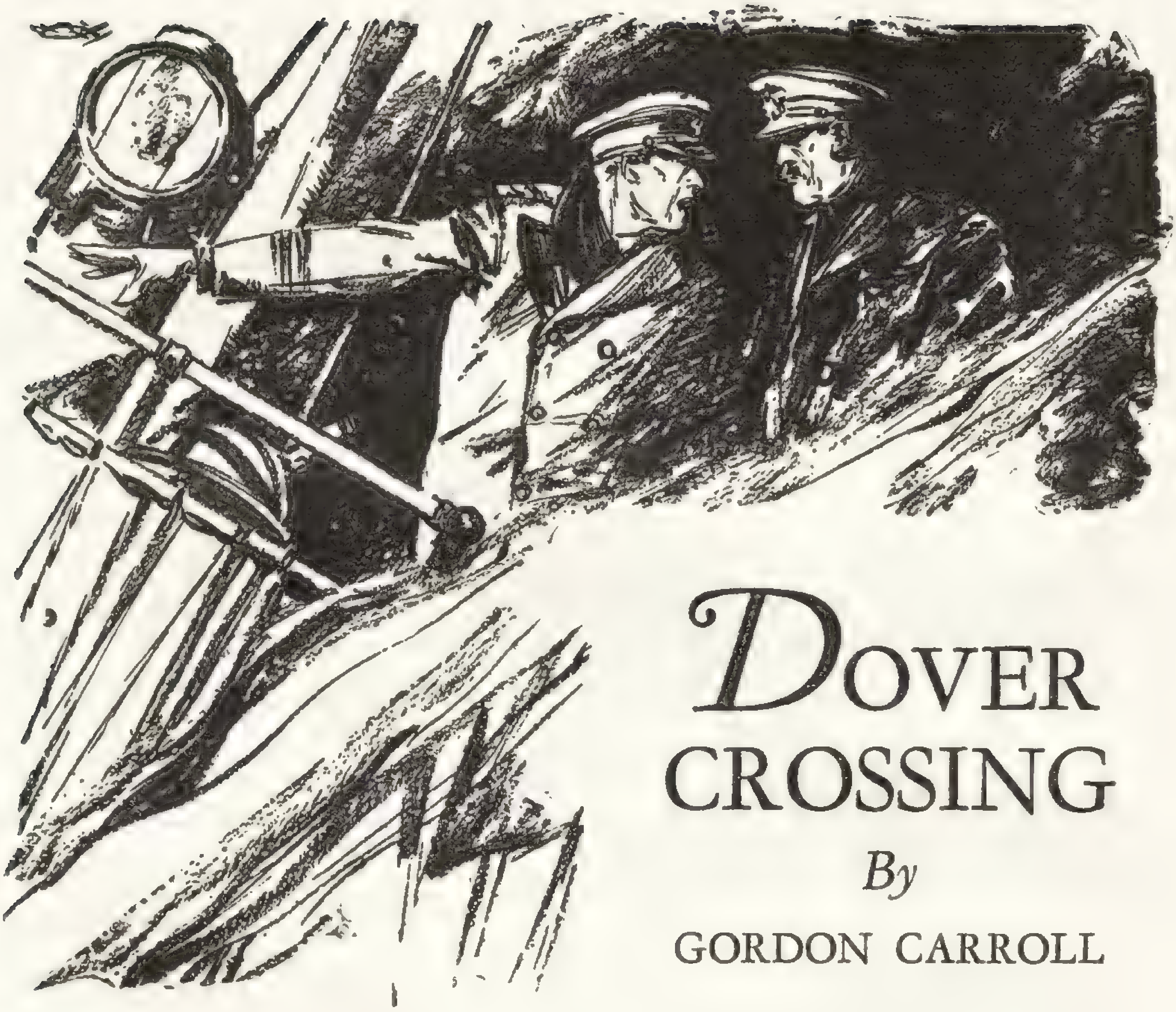
"The waiting people were arrayed in holiday garb. Girls wore their bravest silk kimonos and *obi* sashes, while the men were decked out in their best coolie coats. Even a few stoical Shinto priests were there, wearing elaborately brocaded kimonos trimmed with mink. There were to be big doings in celebration of the safe homecoming after the storm. The manager of the station invited us to participate; he intimated with a sly wink that there would be plenty sake and geisha girls after the sumptuous *sukiyaki* dinner that was to be held. We thanked him but explained the importance of returning to Yokohama immediately so the film might get aboard the *Asama-Maru* bound for San Francisco. Besides, we had seen all the whales we cared to for awhile."

"Well, at any rate it was a great picture, Ariel," we assured him, as we stood up.

"Glad you boys liked it." He grinned. "And I hope the people who see it give a thought to the trouble required to land such a picture."

"Yeah," growled Heise. "You know the office's usual comment on such jobs."

"I know." I laughed. "Technically O. K. Two big words!"



DOVER CROSSING

By

GORDON CARROLL

SHE had seen better days, this small, old fashioned torpedo craft. Bronzed youths in their twenties, who were paid as officers, spent hours in disguising the dented and patched disfigurements of age. Their method was a liberal use of black paint, and the delicate addition of brass wind-vanes on the masthead, with little badges and such affixed to the dinghies.

The resulting effect—at a distance—was one of trimness, save that closer inspection revealed the name *Clive* on the destroyer's bow, and the whole Royal Navy knew that the *Clive* was built in 1899. And knew, too, in slight mitigation, that the patrol flotilla, attached to Dover Strait in this year of the war 1916, took what vessels it could get, irrespective of appearance and the conditions of service.

When in port, which spelled a three-day stand-off after ten days' running, tinkering jobs were undertaken in the *Clive's* engine room. A certain number of boilers were cleaned and small repairs were carried out by the flotilla artificers, sometimes referred to as the patch-up and sticking plaster brigade. Night after night they labored and hammered and sweated to keep the ancient flotilla going. Once clear of Dover harbor limits, it was up to the destroyers themselves—they put out to sea with a brave face, and a prayer from the patchwork brigade.

Tonight, being November and blustery, the *Clive* lay beside a Calais pierhead, while cold, slashing rain beat down on ship and shore, hiding the land lights behind a gray curtain. Crauford, the *Clive's* youthful captain, stood tall and alert beneath the dripping edge of the wheelhouse, his slicker pulled about his ears, and stared at the silent pier alongside, where two arc lights cast a protesting aura of yellow into the night.

The dock sheds were vacant, the railway tracks deserted; the only sign of life was the home-like glow of a lamp in the sentry box, beyond the destroyer's gang. It was 9 P. M, and in thirty minutes the *Clive* was to cast off and head back for Dover, her day's work done. She now was awaiting arrival of the Channel escort force at Calais harbor entrance.

Crauford stuck out his lower lip, blew heartily, and was rewarded by seeing a cascade of raindrops shimmer from the end of his nose. A chance rivulet of water suddenly spurted through the canvas shield above his head and penetrated the one spot at the nape of his neck where the slicker was not pulled tight. The cold finger of water ran down his skin.

"Damn!" he mumbled at the dripping night, and stepped into the shelter of the *Clive's* cabin.

Inside, he lighted a cigaret and glanced at his wristwatch. Twenty-five minutes to go . . . Strahan, the *Clive's* first lieutenant, leaned on the chart table nearby and whistled between his teeth, a dismal tune to accompany the more dismal rain drumming on the cabin's topside.

"Choice night, rather," observed the lieutenant, who was twenty-two, four years Crauford's junior.

"Yes, rather," Crauford replied sarcastically, and stared at his watch again.

Twenty minutes, now. He spoke an order through the voice tube and, after a reasonable delay, seamen's feet thumped on the plating beneath the *Clive's* bridge as the crew stirred about in preparation for departure. In impudent farewell, the rain, without warning, increased to a torrent.

Crauford rolled down his slicker collar, while the moisture from the coat dripped steadily to make a larger splotch on the matting. There was one redeeming fact about this night, he admitted grudgingly; if it was bad here, it was so in the Channel, and that meant faint chance of German activity; a quick crossing for the *Clive*—and then a warm bed at Dover. A warm bed, with a tot of coffee and rum!

Fifteen minutes to go, his watch told him.

Outside in the night, two points of yellow light suddenly sputtered through the rain, eight hundred feet forward of the destroyer's bow, where the shore joined the pier. They were quickly joined by two more, then two more; six in all. They flickered and wavered in the darkness, as though suspended from the hands of walking men. But the speed with which they approached, the manner in which they clung in pairs, bespoke their nature. Three motor cars, headlights on full.

The door of the sentry box opened, displaying the figure of the marine guard, stenciled in the ribbon of illumination spreading from the entrance. The approaching autos were making good time, holding to the concrete between the slippery rails; the sentry stepped full into the rain, rifle at his side. In the light of the lamp he glistened like a black and silver statue.

Crauford rubbed moisture from the *Clive's* cabin panes and stared at the three machines. The silence of the night was, as yet, unbroken, save for the steady patter of the rain. Then Strahan, blue eyes reflective, suddenly spoke his senior's thoughts.

"Good Lord! More passengers!"

The words came out to chafe a sore spot—the irritating knowledge that for the past months the *Clive*, and her sister ships, had been serving as sea transport for officials of one sort or another. The brass hats had turned thumbs down on the cross-Channel steam packets; instead, they preferred, as a matter of choice, the British destroyers, which were faster and more likely to run on schedule. Staff officers, potentates, politicians, even royalty, had sat in Crauford's cabin for the crossing.

The passengers were wont to debark at Calais, or Dover or Boulogne, and depart in haste, murmuring careless thanks to Crauford as they clattered down the gangplank:

"Fine voyage, Captain! Thanks a lot. Cheerio—"

Cheerio indeed! What the hell did they know about cheer?

CRAUFORD transferred his gaze from the approaching motor cars to his wristwatch. Twelve more minutes! If the *Clive* failed to rendezvous with the Channel escort force at appointed time it meant a lone crossing for her. The escort—lucky blokes—waited for nothing. No passengers for them; no delays. Their job was to patrol the Channel. But the *Clive* must wait; Admiralty orders said so.

It seemed the army and the home office expected the more decrepit of the flotilla ships to cooperate indulgently, and that included transportation of passengers, whenever and wherever. Even Crauford, in the sanctity of the *Clive's* mess, spoke of the flotilla as the "royal ferry service". It was, the wardroom decided, a damned appropriate name.

The marine sentry on the pier, rifle alert, stepped to the first car as it halted in a flurry of rain. There followed a short conversation, and then the sentry hailed the *Clive's* quartermaster. The latter came up to the destroyer's wheelhouse, there to stand in the doorway, his oilskins dripping.

"The sentry, sor, says there's somebody wants to see you on the wharf."

"What does he look like?" Crauford retorted. "Is he an officer?"

"Yes, sor. He says so. There's two of 'em, sor."

Crauford grimaced sidewise at Strahan, pulled up his slicker collar once more, stepped out into the rain. Head bowed, he managed the gang, set foot on the pier and walked toward the halted machines. As the sentry opened his lips to explain, he was saved the trouble by a face that appeared between the side curtains of the leading car. A red band, proclaiming army staff, encircled the protruding cap.

"I say, Captain Crauford," the officer called into the downpour, "can you give passage?"

"Certainly."

The door of the Rolls swung open, allowing the staff man to step to the flooded concrete. As he turned about to tug at the handle of the other door, Crauford noted that the front fenders and bonnet of the car were crumpled, dents which, evidence said, had been recently inflicted. Flakes of gray paint still clung to the cracked metal, and the brasswork was spattered with mud. There had been a smash tonight, probably on the way to the pier. Yet the staff man made no mention of mishaps; instead, he spoke casually over one shoulder.

"Sorry, but we missed the Channel packet."

The rear door came open and a second man clambered down, tall, spare, clad in a weather coat whose upturned collar shadowed his face. The staff officer murmured an introduction which was lost to Crauford in the lash of the rain; he only felt the grasp of the other's fingers, cold and wet under the downpour. He moved backward a few steps as the doors of the remaining cars opened and other men crawled out.

The first staff officer turned on Crauford, and it was then the destroyer captain saw the other bore a gash across one cheek, which had bled quite recently. The man's overcoat was crumpled and stained; underneath the bent cap vizor his face was drawn; all mute testimony that he had been jolted in the mishap to the Rolls. Crauford thought to comment, but the other spoke first.

"There's a load of luggage here, Captain," he remarked smoothly. "I'll try to speed it up."

Already the car drivers, assisted by two orderlies, were tugging and pulling at several heavy trunks which reposed in the rear of each machine, held tightly within the narrow confine of the tonneaus. Watching the operations, Crauford idly pondered the display of revolvers at the men's belts; all were armed, and heavily.

Unusual precautions for a traveling party, he reflected; they might as well be at the Front, for all this.

The trunks, bulky, each about the size of a field box, bore sturdy handles on either end to give purchase for the laboring men. The chests were dragged from the cars to the ramp, then pulled across the concrete in the direction of the *Clive's* gang. Crauford measured the steep slant of the plank, then glanced at the trunks, as though to decide the motive power necessary to place them aboard. His eyes presaged some doubt.

"Want my men to give you a hand?" he called to the stranger in the red banded cap.

"Not a bit!"

There seemed undue bruskness in the other's voice; the reply was sharp as a file, and as cold. Crauford shrugged and turned away. At the rate the luggage was moving now, it would be ten minutes before the last trunk rested on the *Clive's* dripping deck. Two of the minutes passed and then Crauford heard the two officers begin to converse behind him. The tall, shrouded one was protesting:

"Won't hear of it, I tell you. Entirely unnecessary, your presence aboard. What you need is a bit of medical attention, in town. Accident was unavoidable . . . Yes, I understand your responsibilities, but I'll take care of them. Stuff will be delivered safely."

"But, sir, I—" the red hatted one was cut short.

"I assume all responsibility."

The tone was terse; the staff aide bowed to its finality, and in the glare of the headlights the gash on his cheek was a deep scarlet.

Crauford, alone, shrugged again. Go ahead and chat, you two; to hell with the time! But he wondered at the conversation. Why the dramatics?

Then he cupped hands before his mouth and called to Strahan who, from the shelter of the *Clive's* wheelhouse, was watching the scene with complacency born of dry comfort. The lieutenant sauntered to the cabin door.

"Give the escort a W. T!" Crauford shouted.

Strahan departed for the radio cuddy to advise the Marconi man about the escort force; to tell the ships off Calais that the *Clive* would not keep her rendezvous. Soon the radio crackled out the terse message. The lieutenant returned to the bridge and withdrew into the shelter of the cabin.

ON THE pier, Crauford watched the luggage go up the gang beneath the rough ministrations of brawny hands. Six chests, he counted, each covered with a square of tarpaulin, Crauford smiled sourly. Cushy job, these staff chiefs had! They traveled like ladies of style. Chests for this, for that, and maybe one or two left over for choice liquors and cigars. And further, the royal ferry service at their disposal for the asking. Crauford curled his lip savagely.

The last piece of luggage was heaved on to the deck, the orderlies came clattering down the gang, the driver of the first car stooped before the radiator and gave the crank a throw. The Rolls motor coughed into life. The other cars, too, began to pant. The tall officer, bundled heavily in the weather coat, imparted some last minute instructions to his junior. Then he swung about and set foot on the *Clive's* gang. But with one glove on the rope rail, he halted abruptly and turned once more in the direction of his car. It appeared as though he were going to call the aide to his side, but the impulse died. His chin jerked up in firm decision, and he began ascent of the gang. Crauford followed.

A supervising steward saw the passenger installed, with his luggage, in the captain's cabin, while Crauford made for the bridge. Ratings pulled in the gang; Crauford's hand moved the telegraph indicator. With a sudden tremble and surge of energy the *Clive* backed from the pier.

Already the motor cars on the wharf were turning, their headlights cutting bravely through the rain. They completed the turn and jolted away down the pier. The marine reentered his sentry box. The *Clive* swung in a wide circle and headed for the Channel.

"Who's the bigwig?" Strahan asked abruptly.

Crauford frowned.

"We'll never know, I'd hazard. Just ho! for the royal ferry, and the devil take the tickets!"

He lapsed into silence, disgruntled by the knowledge that the *Clive* had missed her escort.

The destroyer now was clearing harbor limits, and the rain, that had been sweeping the roadstead in solid sheets, lightened. The *Clive's* bow began to roll beneath the first swell, incoming from the Channel. Somewhere ahead, hidden in the sodden night, were the escort ships, tearing for Dover at thirty-two knots, or better.

The *Clive's* wheelhouse was dark, only the dim glow from the binnacle illuminating the face of the seaman at the wheel, and the youthful features of Crauford and Strahan, where they stood close together by the chart table. Topside, and along the decks, rain spattered the fast moving hull. The lieutenant scratched his chin preparatory to breaking the silence.

"Now why would one man travel with six trunks?" he ruminated audibly.

"Because," Crauford replied succinctly, "we've got room aboard for 'em. I told the steward to give our visitor hot cocoa and toast, but from the looks of the luggage, I'd say one of those trunks will be producing brandy by now."

"Ah!" Strahan muttered, light invading his blue eyes. "Ah! Real brandy! Just think! Say 1858! In a tall bottle, with a red wax top and a yellow label and a fragrant bouquet and—"

"Oh, shut up!" Crauford snapped. "What d'ye know—"

He raised one hand suddenly, in serious caution. Some one was mounting the companionway. Strahan moved over to the port side of the cabin, entrusting the visitor to Crauford's undivided attention.

"I say, Captain."

The crisp voice made itself heard without effort, its owner the tall, spare individual who rode as passenger. Between the words, the intonation was friendly, but it conveyed, too, a sharp tang of ingrained authority. Crauford groaned to himself. Another passing visitor, this fellow, who would soon, no doubt, explain the preferential status of the army as compared to the navy . . .

"Righto!" he responded.

The passenger stepped forward into the small confine of the cabin and seemed, for a moment, to be confused by the gloom. Beneath his feet the floor of the wheelhouse pitched and rolled at embarrassing angles as the Channel waves pawed at the *Clive's* hull.

"This way," Crauford added, inviting the visitor across the matting to the vicinity of the engine control where he stood.

In the darkness the other's figure was vaguely discernible. Tall, of course, and trim shouldered. Face indistinct beneath the cap brim. A high staff officer, probably, carrying first hand reports from the Front. Beyond that, accurate description failed. A repetition of previous trips, Crauford decided; he had seen these officers before, bundled and luggaged and puffed with importance, crossing the Channel with news for Downing Street.

"A wet night," the officer observed.

"Quite," Crauford replied . . . Lord, what jewel of observation next?

"Sorry to delay you," the other added, "but I missed the last Channel steamer. My machine cracked another near the landing—pretty badly; that is, for the occupant of the other. Made him miss the steamer too."

"We're always glad to be of service," Crauford put in.

Across the cabin, he sensed that Strahan repressed a sardonic chuckle, and made a mental note that the lieutenant would pay for the same tomorrow.

"Fellow in the other car had urgent business, also," the staff officer continued imperturbably." "I took over his cargo of baggage; promised him to deliver it safely at Dover. Reports, papers, commitments, y'know."

"Oh, I see," Crauford murmured politely.

Pretty decent of this fellow to help the other; but still, six trunks were a lot. Too much, one might say, even if it were the staff way of doing things.

The officer abruptly changed the subject, as though satisfied at the explanation of his presence.

"Huns been active of late?" he asked.

Crauford could have sworn that a note of anxiety crept into the other's voice; more anxiety than the question warranted.

"Not a bit," he answered promptly. "Monitors brushed with a patrol last week, but nothing since."

"Ah!" A short pause. "What are we turning now?"

"About twenty-five knots."

"We'll be in—?"

"At quarter to eleven. Sooner, if the rain lets up."

AT CRAUFORD'S words, as though by direct invitation, the heavy drumming of the downpour on the cabin slacked. A few rivulets of water ran down the panes and vanished; outside, the blanket of the night lifted a bit. Strahan opened a port and cool drafts of air, carrying but a hint of moisture, rushed in. Behind the *Clive's* stern the sodden curtain of rain disappeared into the darkness, pressing close on to the French shore as the low hanging clouds sped southward. The Channel, in the wake of the downpour, lay gray and grim, with visibility improved yet still poor. The heavy swell remained, rolling the small boat like a suspended barrel; gurgling masses of water poured over the forepeak and swept along the deck.

The officer cleared his throat.

"I imagine," he remarked, "you have a pretty rough time on destroyers out here."

Crauford suddenly warmed; at least, this fellow was more solicitous than most.

"I suppose we do," he answered on a new note, "but nothing much to write home about. The chaps in the big, new thirty-five knotters have a much better time than we, but I daresay the Admiralty has nothing better to offer."

"No doubt," the other replied; then stared out through the open port, where only the gray wall of the night met his vision.

Crauford could not clearly glimpse the man's eyes, but he began to be aware, however slightly, of a certain tension in the figure close to his side. The officer's hands were rammed deep in his capacious coat pockets, and the eyes, when they reflected a momentary gleam from the binnacle, seemed hard set. He scanned the seascape ahead and all around. Then he turned to Crauford.

"I think I'll go below and catch a wink. I've got thirty minutes, eh?"

Crauford replied in the affirmative.

The officer groped for the companionway, and in a few moments his boots clicked on the metal stripping. Then he was gone. Strahan walked over to Crauford's side.

"Odd cove, what?" he said, fingering his trim mustache.

"Righto!" Crauford responded. "Got something on his mind, or I'm crazy."

The helmsman stood immobile on the grating, wheel held firmly in his bronzed hands. If he had overheard bits of the conversation, he gave no evidence; his eyes remained unwaveringly upon the compass card. Strahan sighed plaintively and opened another port.

"As I was saying," he murmured, "before I was interrupted, a bottle of 1858, a thin glass—"

The helmsman stirred suddenly.

"I think, sor," he said, "I see a light—"

The voice of a lookout cut him short, reporting a light off the starboard bow. Crauford snatched for his night glasses. The distant light blinked twice, was extinguished. The signal officer came tumbling up to the bridge in response to Crauford's voice on the phone tube. He moved out to the wing of the bridge and threw the switch on the blinker signal.

Cautiously, he flashed a challenge. No response. Where the light out in the Channel had winked, there was now only impenetrable night. Crauford had judged the light a mile away, dimly visible in the haze. The signal officer switched the blinker again. Then he moved toward the cabin side.

"I think," he remarked steadily, "that there's something funny about that light out there. Any radio activity, sir?"

"Not a word," Crauford answered. "Flash again."

The lamp on the wing of the *Clive's* bridge spoke once more, and the signal officer stood erect by the rail to scan the sea. For a few seconds only the black rewarded his gaze. Then, with a startling wave of brightness, a searchlight glowed on the horizon, groped in the mist, descended, and transfixed the *Clive* in a white spot of brilliance. It knifed through the night, selected the destroyer's forward funnel as a target and clung there.

The signal officer cried on a harsh note—

"Hun, sir!"

In accompaniment, a flame stabbed from the distant boat and the whine of a shell filled the night. The projectile struck ahead of the *Clive*, a bare fifty yards to starboard.

The destroyer, in an instant, was a hive of frenzied activity. A swarm of humanity vomited on to the deck, from steerage room and mess deck; sailors, gunners, torpedo men, stumbling and cursing in their haste to take fire stations. The phone tube from the bridge sent Crauford's voice crackling to every cuddy of the ship. With a nervous movement he pushed the helmsman from the grating and seized the wheel himself, to be in instant command as action developed.

All this while, the enemy ship increased fire—queer, electric flashes of flame from her guns, and drawing, as reward, an answering challenge from the *Clive's* starboard battery. Strahan had been controlling since the first call to stations, and he had the stranger's range to a nicety. All across the bosom of the gray sea the searchlights, British and German, pawed at each other, caught the targets, hung tenaciously for an instant, then passed on swiftly into gun smoke as the roll of the ships defied steadiness. An indescribable thrill passed through Crauford's breast as he stood at the wheel—it was the ecstacy of sea fighting, which had been denied him so long. He smiled grimly at the compass.

IN THE diffused glare of the *Clive's* searchlight Crauford could distinguish the silhouettes of the gunners on the forward deck moving in quick, precise motions as Strahan passed the order for independent firing. The range, Crauford estimated, was two thousand yards; not far, yet hard on accuracy, with the *Clive* rolling as she was. The German destroyer—her type revealed in the caliber of the shells that were frothing the sea about the British vessel—had maintained from the first a parallel course, hoping for a quick victory in the heavier metal of her broadside. Though only five minutes had passed since the first gun spoke above the Channel, already the *Clive* reeked of burned powder, and the oily smoke from her glowing funnels.

The navigating officer, recently arrived at Crauford's side, pointed a decisive finger in the direction of the German craft. Ahead of her, quarter of a mile, another searchlight split the night, and astern, an equal distance, a third glowed. They were hung along the horizon like Cyclopean eyes.

"Flushed a Hun patrol," the navigating officer remarked in a matter-of-fact voice, as though he had not a worry in the world.

Two of the *Clive's* starboard guns shifted without warning and commenced to throw metal at the new arrivals. By now the whole surface of the sea was crisscrossed with brilliant beams that fluttered in the smoke and dimmed the flare of bursting shells. But it was increasingly apparent to Crauford that with their superior speed, already displayed, the German destroyers were converging on to the *Clive's* course, hoping to cut off the smaller vessel between mid-Channel and Dover. It could be done, and easily; slight chance of British help in under twenty minutes. And in twenty minutes a small destroyer could take a deal of battering. Crauford's fingers clenched on the wheel.

At the moment he thought, somehow, of the passenger below deck; and his lips parted in a drawn smile. Good for the officer's blood, this was. Give him a touch of war at sea, away from the comforting solidity of terra firma. Give him—

A queer tremor took possession of the *Clive* as the impact of the first solid hit was transmitted through the boat. The projectile burst somewhere below with a shuddering, muffled explosion. Crauford glanced grimly at his navigator. The smell of burning paintwork rose to their nostrils simultaneously, and it was plain that a substantial hit had been registered, although in the smoke and deafening noise the two men could not tell where. A messenger was sent to inquire and he slithered down the ladder.

As the messenger's cap disappeared, Crauford conned the night. Wherever he looked the German guns stabbed the darkness, brief flames that glowed red and orange, then died. Smoke from a dozen gusting funnels was spreading out like a huge fan above the waves. Whatever course of battle Crauford intended to pursue must be decided now. He gaged all the possibilities; then decided swiftly, as though there had never been the slightest question. His fingers closed on the wheel and spun it.

"What are you going to do, sir?" The navigator found his voice with a harsh squawk.

"Run down one o' the Huns!' Crauford cried, and the cords in his neck grew as lean as rope.

The wheel came over obediently, sending the prow of the *Clive* plunging into a long roller, canting her deck at a steep angle. Spray burst over the forward gunners, and they ducked their heads momentarily. Aft of the bridge, the *Clive's* searchlights swung with the changed course, streaking out fingers of molten silver above the bow; the funnels emitted another burst of sparks, like a swarm of fiery bees.

Crauford concentrated mind and body on the scene ahead. The German destroyers, thrown off the scent temporarily by the *Clive's* sudden maneuver, found their lights groping over the surface, lost for the time being. Then the beams slowly converged in unison and picked out the prow of the British boat, bearing down at utmost speed on the center of the German line. The Hun fire increased as the *Clive's* slackened, for the latter's starboard battery was out, lost to the target. Only the forward gun maintained its rapid, independent fire, the muzzle flame reflected back against the bridge screens. Along the rail the torpedo men scowled blackly, for even had a fair target presented itself, they were handicapped by the pitch of the sea.

Crauford's concentration was disturbed by the vague knowledge that some one had arrived to stand close by his elbow. He glanced about and saw, not the navigating officer, but the indistinct features of the *Clive's* tall passenger. The man stood silently for the space of a breath, and stared ahead through the ports to where the German vessels flamed in the haze. Then he spoke abruptly, voice stark as he repeated, unknowingly, the question asked by the navigator—

"What are you doing, man?"

The words were taut as a violin string.

"Trying to ram one o' them," Crauford retorted through thin lips.

"Good God, man, you can't!"

THE peremptory voice fanned an ember of anger inside Crauford. Of a sudden he forgot his surroundings; he became intent on the fact that his, the captain's, authority was challenged; and by a ruddy land soldier at that! His knuckles showed white where they gripped the wheel; beneath his feet he was conscious that the planking pulsed with the thrust of the *Clive's* engines, opened full. Eyes fastened dead ahead, where the German batteries proclaimed themselves, he spat the words over one shoulder:

"Can't, eh? Can't? Watch me!"

As his tongue moved, he felt a wave of disgust welling up inside. Fine chap, this officer! Gutless, he was! Afraid of his skin, and that precious badge on his cap! . .

But the officer's hand had already streaked out and grasped Crauford's arm tightly, almost frantically. He pressed his lips close to Crauford's ear, though in the noise and confusion of the battle there was slight chance of his words being overheard. By now the gap between the opposing destroyers was narrowed to a thousand yards; the *Clive* was drawing a concentrated fire, and taking terrible punishment.

"Those chests below, man! The chests!"

The officer's voice barely penetrated the inner circle of Crauford's thoughts.

"Oh, damn the chests!" the captain cried.

"But they're money, Crauford!" the officer raced on. "Gold and notes, I tell you. Two million pounds!"

Crauford tried to shake off the tense fingers on his arm, and failed. Even in the bedlam of the moment the words bit deep—left a compelling mark. So that was the secret, eh? That was why the motor cars had arrived on the pier at the last minute, after missing the Channel steamer. That explained the tall man's tenseness, the dramatic conversation with the injured aide, the insistent care with which the luggage had been put aboard.

Nothing unusual, this transshipment of war gold across the Channel. It had been done before, and often, but there was invariably secret notice, and stealthy preparation. Tonight, the precious cargo had been intended for the Channel packet. Then an auto mishap, an injured officer, a change in guardians. Orders confused, and the steamer had pulled out. Yet the gold must go over, and the *Clive* was handy. Simple enough solution on the surface; so simple, Crauford bitterly reflected, that he had been kept in ignorance. Why in hell hadn't this officer confided in him? What could he do now?

Once more he conned his ship and the night. Beyond the bow the three German destroyers were aglow with searchlights and gunfire. Only the heaving swell of the Channel and the instability of gun platforms had saved the *Clive* from annihilation, for the sea, all around, was a spume of bursting shells, ghost-like columns, tall and white in the glare of the battle. The *Clive* was being hit, though, and hard; even at this instant, a splintering crash aft told of a heavy blow. But above the din, Crauford could hear the yeoman's voice reporting to Strahan on the control platform:

"One 'it, sor . . . Two 'its, sor."

Yes, the Huns were getting their share, too!

Crauford automatically gave an order, and was surprised at the flat calmness of his voice.

"Concentrate more on the bows of the boat ahead."

The yeoman spoke into the tube; Crauford's inner thoughts pressed themselves forward again for solution.

Five hundred yards separated the *Clive* from the German. It was too late to waver now, even if he chose. A turn at this range would be fatal. Already, those on the German craft had divined Crauford's intention, but it was for them, also, too late. A cloud of smoke and sparks belched from the German's funnels, and Crauford got a momentary whiff of this as his boat tore forward.

Too late! He shook off the restraining fingers on his arm. He knew, now, that the staff officer sensed the impending drama; the clenched hand fell away without protest. Stokers were tumbling out on the *Clive's* forward deck, armed to repel boarders. Searchlights sprayed everywhere, giving the night a weird aura; concussion of the guns shook the *Clive's* plates; smoke, acrid and enveloping, hung over the scene, heavy with the smell of burning woodwork.

It was all to happen within the next few seconds, but even in his sweep of nervous exhilaration, Crauford, at the last instant, sensed the irony of his position. Two million pounds in the cabin below, and the *Clive* not worth a tenth of that. A balance for the red side of the war ledger. Could he have gotten safely away, with warning? Could he?

AT THIS moment the *Clive* crashed into the German destroyer's port side abreast of the middle funnel. Crauford's emotion overcame him, and he found himself cheering in a strange voice, clinging, meanwhile, to the wheel to steady his legs from the heavy shock. The *Clive's* knife-like prow ground its way into the German's flank; in the blaze of the gun flashes, Crauford read the other's name, *G. 91*, as her bow swung around toward the *Clive*. The impact of the collision had carried the enemy craft away on the *Clive's* ram.

Strahan, revolver in hand, raced through the cabin on his way to the forward deck, and Crauford had one glimpse of the lieutenant's taut face. The helmsman had vanished, seizing a loaded rifle from the rack at the top of the companionway as he stumbled away. Gone too were the navigating officer and the yeoman. Crauford had the cabin to himself, he thought; then he wheeled abruptly to stare into the bleak eyes of the staff officer.

Crauford stopped in his tracks. The noise and bedlam from the forward deck, where men were fighting hand to hand, faded from his ears. Brain frozen for an instant, he stared steadily and wide eyed.

Lord, this other man's face was familiar! He hadn't seen it before, in full; only now, with the cap askew, the coat collar turned down, the features clear in the reflected glare from the twisting searchlights. Who was he? Where had he seen those imperious features before. He rubbed his eyes fiercely, as though confronting a phantom; then dropped his hands. No, it was still there! Who? He cursed harshly. He couldn't remember; couldn't get his thoughts to working properly. He gave up.

And the officer, jerking a revolver from a hook on the wall, vanished down the companionway.

The *Clive*, steaming at thirty knots, had whirled the German destroyer in a sickening arc, and she hung along the *Clive's* port, forward, her guns pointed above deck. One of her torpedo tubes had stuck into the *Clive's* plates and was wrenched off its mounting; her decks were littered with débris and bodies. And, hardly before the impact had passed, the *Clive's* guns, some able now to bear at maximum depression, were turned on to the German and literally squirted four-inch shells into the vessel.

The other two destroyers in the enemy patrol, sister ships and uncrippled, circled aimlessly about the *Clive* and her impaled victim, unable to fire for fear of spilling German blood.

Despite the blaze of innumerable small fires, the choking smoke, the men's cries, the noise of exploding shells and firearms, Crauford stood rooted to the matting and stared at the scene. He tried to hold his muscles under control, but failed; they leaped and quivered as though he were being lashed. In a frenzy of excitement, he yanked a rifle from the rack and, leaning through a port, fired the magazine into a cluster of German sailors huddled about their forward gun. Some of them fell; others replied with rifle and pistol, and broken glass and splinters whirred about Crauford's face.

He dropped the empty rifle and reached for another one; and as he did so, a sub-lieutenant, bleeding from a cheek wound, stumbled into the cabin.

"We're going down by the head, sir," he panted. "Engineers say water's pouring in from forward."

Crauford forgot the rifle, raced to the bridge to glance down over the foredeck.

The *Clive* had knifed the German's flank, true enough, but the strain had told. Her foredeck had slipped to the level of the Hun's side, and was now but a scant distance above the Channel surface. Only the force of the *Clive's* propellers, keeping her bow close into her victim's side, was stemming the rush of water through wrenched plates.

This fact became more apparent on the German destroyer, and the knowledge spread in a burst of renewed cheering. The rattle of small arm fire increased at the spot where the two boats were joined, and Crauford, in a fleet glimpse, saw the *Clive's* crew edged backward from the forepeak. Once this was cleared, it would all be over; a surge of German sailors across the *Clive's* deck, a cessation of the pulse of her engines, and the battle was won. The Germans could clamber back to comparative safety, leaving the *Clive* a helpless hulk, slowly sinking, a target for concentrated fire. Sixty men and two million pounds at stake!

Crauford snatched a Webley pistol from the wall, ran to the bridge and slid down the ladder. All about him the air was full of whining sounds, the spatter of lead against harder steel, a heavy smell of smoke and blistered paintwork.

AS HE stepped from beneath the shelter of the bridge, the tall staff officer appeared suddenly at his side, silent and wordless, like a wraith in the swirling fumes. His hand still grasped the pistol; he must have come up on deck from the temporary safety of his cabin. In the shadow of his cap his lips were compressed in a thin gash. He threw out an arm and dragged Crauford around a corner of the conning tower, away from the whistling steel that was spraying the decks.

"Look here, Captain," the officer cried. "Hold up! No time for heroics. We've got to save this ship!"

A rifle bullet pinged against a bridge support nearby and whined away; another burst of cheering came from forward, although in the confusion there was no telling which side exulted. Crauford snarled at his companion:

"Save the ship? Why, certainly, you damned fool!"

The epithet flared out and flicked the other man's face like a whip. The lips became almost bloodless. Again in the dull light, Crauford could have sworn he knew that face, now stern and forbidding. But the officer swallowed his sudden anger with effort; his voice sounded almost emotionless.

"Hand me your cap," he said. Without pausing to weigh the strange request, Crauford passed it over. The other tossed his own to the deck, donned Crauford's. In the semi-gloom, the staff officer could have passed for the *Clive's* captain. The height was the same, the trim shoulders, the lean face. He stood erect, the lines of his jaw drawn and fine.

"I'll take the forepeak," he said precisely. "And you, if I'm not mistaken, can do more damage with an anti-aircraft gun from above—" he jerked his thumb upward where, aft of the wheelhouse, a pom-pom stood on a platform. "If they get me, 'twill mean little. The ship will still have a captain."

Before Crauford could protest, the man was gone—around a corner of the conning tower, on to the forward deck. A gunner in the *Clive's* crew saw the white topped cap approaching and shouted. This time the cheering was British.

Crauford made his way to the gun platform. As he trained the small barrel on the German's forward deck, he wondered, oddly, at the treachery of time. Hardly fifteen minutes had passed since the German destroyer's light was first glimpsed; in the intervening space a lifetime of action had crossed his path . . . He pressed the trigger.

The small shell struck the German's conning tower and exploded like an electric arc. Men tumbled, slumped, lay still. Crauford fired again, and again; a dozen shots, each taking toll. On the *Clive's* forepeak, hidden from Crauford's sight by the bulge of the wheelhouse, new hope came to the crew. Somewhere in that mass of struggling men, the tall, gaunt officer was speaking with authority. The Germans were giving way, inch by inch, toward the shambles of their own decks; men, caught in the backwash, were dropping overside, to be instantly lost in the dark water.

Crauford depressed the gun barrel slightly and then halted his hands in midair, abruptly riven to the spot. Above the noise of the conflict on the *Clive's* forward deck was the dull boom of heavier guns. He stared off the destroyer's starboard side where the other two German craft clung bewildered to the battle, afraid to attack, unwilling to retire before the decision was made. In a wild arc, the German searchlights swung away, and their batteries began to flame again. Then Crauford, too, cheered.

The Dover force had arrived. Already the German destroyers were fleeing under glowing funnels, with a half dozen British craft in close pursuit. The rescue vessels rushed by, no time to waste on the *Clive;* they were after the quarry, to make a full slate of it. Away they tore beneath billowing coils of smoke.

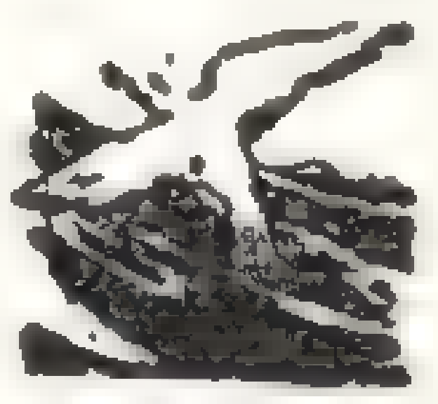
But the momentary interruption they had afforded was sufficient for the *Clive's* crew. With new heart, and the knowledge that the odds had turned, a cluster of British uniforms swept all before them and jumped to the foredeck of the German vessel. There were bursts of revolver fire, a scattered volley from rifles, and *G. 91* gave up the fight. Beneath her bridge an officer waved a white cloth which, at that distance, looked vaguely like a steward's jacket.

Crauford, his pent-up emotion evaporating in the sudden turn of affairs, clambered down from the gun platform. It was strange how tired he was. His head buzzed, his nostrils burned from acrid fumes, his knees had a tendency to wobble. He wiped his forehead on a coat sleeve and set foot on the main deck.

The destruction about him was frightful; already his boots were treading a mass of indescribable rubbish. From above his head, another gust of choking smoke poured out of the *Clive's* shot ridden funnels, bit into his lungs and made him cough. He passed under the bridge wing and left the smoke behind.

The *Clive's* remaining searchlight, and likewise one on the German's topworks, flared up into the sky at awkward angles, shedding sufficient illumination to throw the forward deck into relief. Bodies, shell cases, burned cloth, splintered wood, lay everywhere. A bit of silvery metal glistened on the deck and Crauford recognized the boatswain's whistle, torn away by a blast that must have killed its owner. A few steps farther on his boot struck the man's body.

The survivors of the fight stood about in strange, unnatural attitudes; some silent, some noisy, with queer, forced talk. Men looked at each other; spoke fiercely; then lapsed into mumbles. It was the aftermath of battle lust. Veins cooled and contracted, binding men in a snarl of confusing emotions.



CRAUFORD scanned the deck for a glimpse of the staff officer, but the tall, spare figure was missing. Crauford wondered for a moment. Had the man vanished, with other scores, into the dark water? Then more pressing questions seized his thoughts; for underfoot the *Clive's* deck was tilted at an alarming angle. Water, pouring through the forward plates, was logging the vessel, pulling her down by the head. Something had to be done, and in a hurry. But what?

Crauford weighed the chances; there was no time to lose. The German craft, battered and torn, also was settling rapidly; down in her hull, the rammed plates that had somehow held beneath the first impact, were giving up the fight. Her decks, too, were canted at a steep pitch. And yet the protection of her battered side, cleaved by the *Clive's* prow, was alone keeping a rush of water from the latter's vitals.

Perhaps it would be best for the living to take to the rafts and floating wreckage;

they could bide their time until the rescue ships arrived. The dead would have an honorable grave. Perhaps—

Then a pregnant thought hit him. What of the precious chests below? Transfer them, too?

He balanced this suggestion; then denied it. It wouldn't do; this was not the time to be lugging gold about littered decks. If the *Clive* could be saved, it was best. No one but the staff officer and himself knew; no need to share the secret. The Dover boats would be standing by soon.

He moved back to the bridge, while a score of men, at his orders, sped below to shore the bulkheads with anything that came to hand.

Ten minutes later, when three Dover destroyers came scurrying up in the darkness, they found the *Clive's* depleted crew, and a handful of sullen German captives, clearing the British hull of wreckage, working feverishly below deck to stem the ebbing flow of water through her bow. Ahead, the sea was covered with oil and floating débris where the *G. 91* had plunged to sudden death. Over the *Clive's* starboard bulwarks hung heavy wooden fenders; crisscrossed above them was every available hawser. Makeshift purchases were ready; ropes were slung from any solid hold.

The *Clive* was down by the bow, but holding; and deep in her hull the engines throbbed slowly in reverse. By acting in this manner, Crauford had eased pressure of the water on the destroyer's bow, and was preparing to nose for Dover with the impending aid of another hull lashed to his own—the hull of one of the rescue vessels.

The nearest British boat foamed alongside of the *Clive's* bridge and megaphoned to Crauford, the skipper's voice strident across the waves.

"I'm coming aboard to take over," he cried.

Crauford discovered his throat was frightfully dry.

"All right," he croaked. "Lines are ready."

Below the bridge, Strahan, one arm limp and bloodstained in its sleeve, spoke the orders. The destroyer drew close, scraped the *Clive's* hull; her captain and a score of men scrambled across to the littered deck. Along the lengths of the two boats, both crews began to work feverishly, lashing the hulls together, one high, the other low in the water. Amid the bustle of labor, the new captain mounted to the *Clive's* bridge on a ladder that was torn and bent.

Crauford's face showed white in the light of the electric lamp; his tongue and throat were burning where the smoke had left its sting. The new arrival reached out one arm and touched Crauford's shoulder.

"It's all right, old man," he said. "Take it easy. Go below."

Crauford raised his smarting eyes.

"Yes—yes. All right. But there's a staff officer about here some place. Big, tall chap, in a white cap. Y'see, a big white chap, in a tall cap— Oh, I mean—"

The new skipper winked at his sublieutenant.

"Of course, of course. We'll find him, all right."

"You will, certain?"

"Certainly, old man. Now run along."

Crauford groped down the companionway, struck the corridor, headed for his cabin. He was terribly drowsy, he had to admit. Lord, a wink would do him good! He drew up sharply before the door. What the hell? A light inside?

He pushed the door open.

The emergency wick lamp was burning on the wall and in its glow Crauford saw the figure of the staff officer, a smear of blood across his forehead. He was seated in Crauford's chair, his booted legs resting on top of one of the six chests, which all but filled the narrow cabin. Sound asleep, he was, chest falling and rising gently. Crauford stepped closer to inspect the blood on the other's forehead. He smiled. Mere scratch—he'd let the man be.

But he couldn't leave at once. He stood immobile in the doorway and through red eyes studied the silent man's face, from the iron-gray hair to the blunt chin. It fascinated him, mocked his memory; for a moment, he felt wide awake as he racked his brain. Where had he seen him before? Who was he? Oh, hell, he was too tired, now. Too tired even to guess. A short nap, then he'd remember.

He passed down the corridor, supporting himself on the hand rail, and entered Strahan's cabin. Fumbling and coughing, he pulled off his jacket, dropped his shoes. Within three minutes he was flat on the blankets, snoring with monotony. Beneath the floor of the cabin, the *Clive's* engines turned slowly as her companion ship took up the burden; the new skipper, on the bridge, supervised operations.

Daylight was streaming through the port when Crauford awakened. Outside, beyond sight but not beyond hearing, were the familiar sounds of Dover harbor; the rumble of cranes, the clatter of machinery, even men's voices, curious as their owners stared at the battered *Clive.*

Crauford sat bolt upright on Strahan's bunk. Good Lord! They'd let him sleep through it all. Hell of a fine mess. Captain of the boat, he was, and sleeping at her proudest moment! He swung his legs over the edge of the mattress and reached for his mussed jacket, a sorry garment but the best to be had.

But instead of grasping the jacket, his hand first closed on a white envelop that lay atop the serge. He blinked his eyes and wondered for a moment; then he tore the envelop open, revealing a brief note, written in smooth, copperplate hand.

> Dear Captain Crauford:
>
> This terminates a safe crossing for myself and "luggage". Unasked passengers have to take things as they come, I suppose. But I will always remember last night, and its association. Thanks to your decision of action, I am alive to be able to do so.

Then the signature below flashed into Crauford's eyes and seared his vision. It was etched there, indelibly, that clipped, familiar name. The field marshal's own!

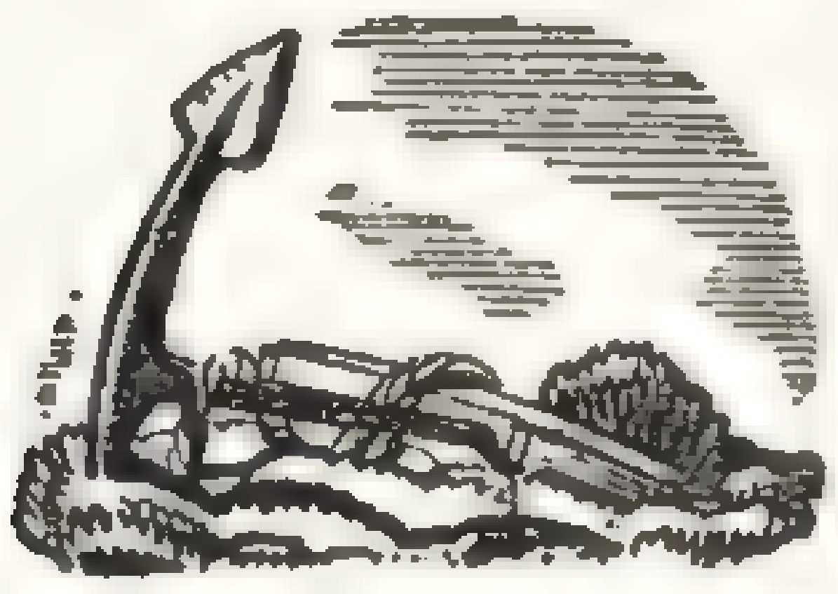
Then Strahan, his arm bandaged neatly in white, appeared in the cabin doorway. Crauford, seated disheveled in the chair, chin cupped in hands while he stared at the crisp note, raised his eyes a bit foolishly.

Strahan, pale but smiling, was first to speak.

"How d'you feel, old man?"

Crauford stared vacantly at the blond lieutenant, through him. His eyes seemed to be envisioning another scene; then he, too, smiled faintly.

"And to think," he remarked to a bewildered Strahan, "that I called that man a damned fool!"

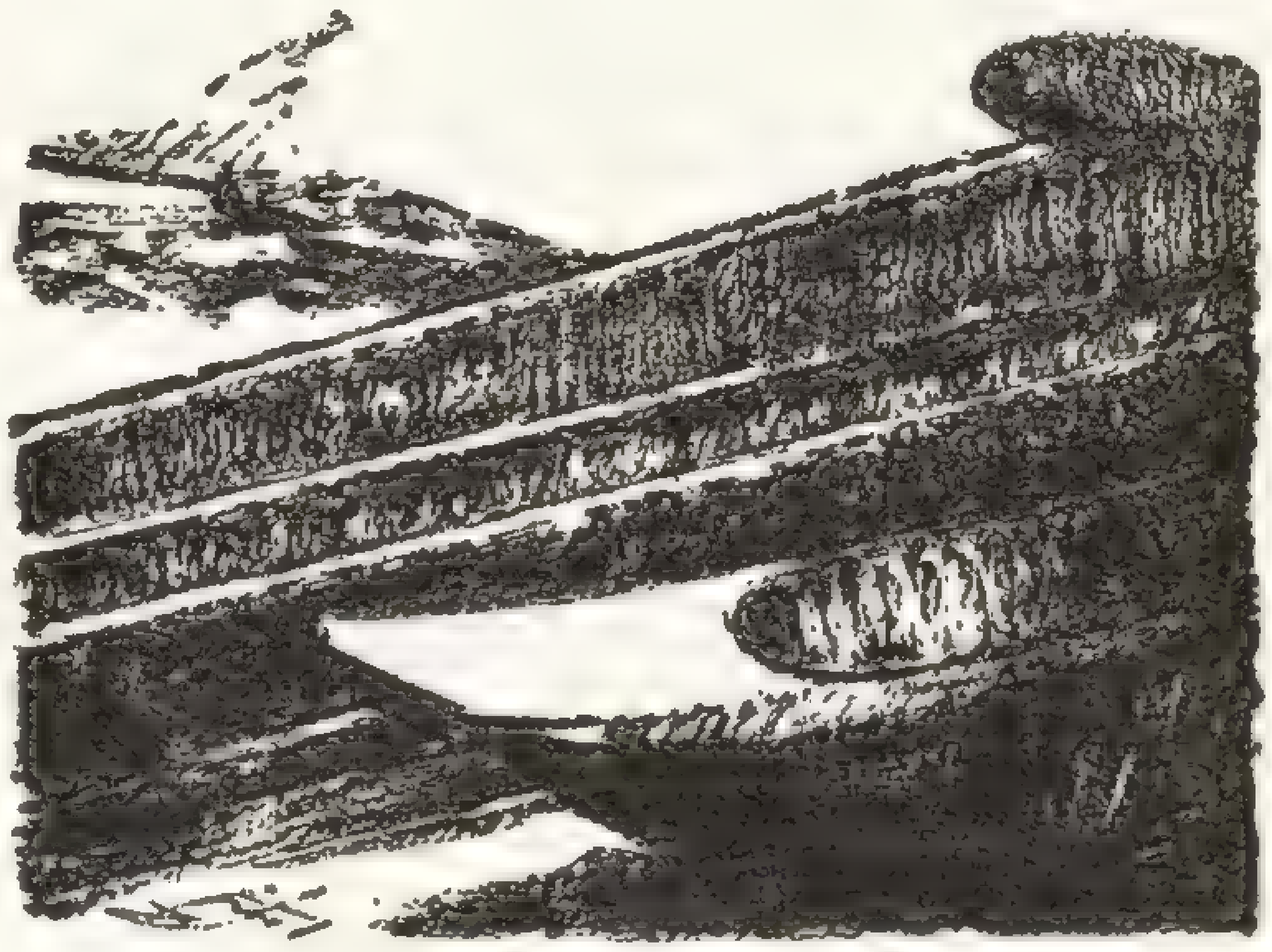


Concluding a Two-Part Story

DARK TRAILS

By

ARTHUR O. FRIEL



JEFF DRISCOLL, an American adventurer in the wilds of Brazil, lost his partner and outfit when their canoe capsized in treacherous river rapids. Armed only with a revolver and a belt of cartridges, he wandered, lost, in the jungle, until he slipped on a root and badly sprained his ankle. Half crazed with pain and hunger, he came at last to a native camp, to find it a community of savage headhunters, the Jiveros. The warriors, he learned, were away on the warpath.

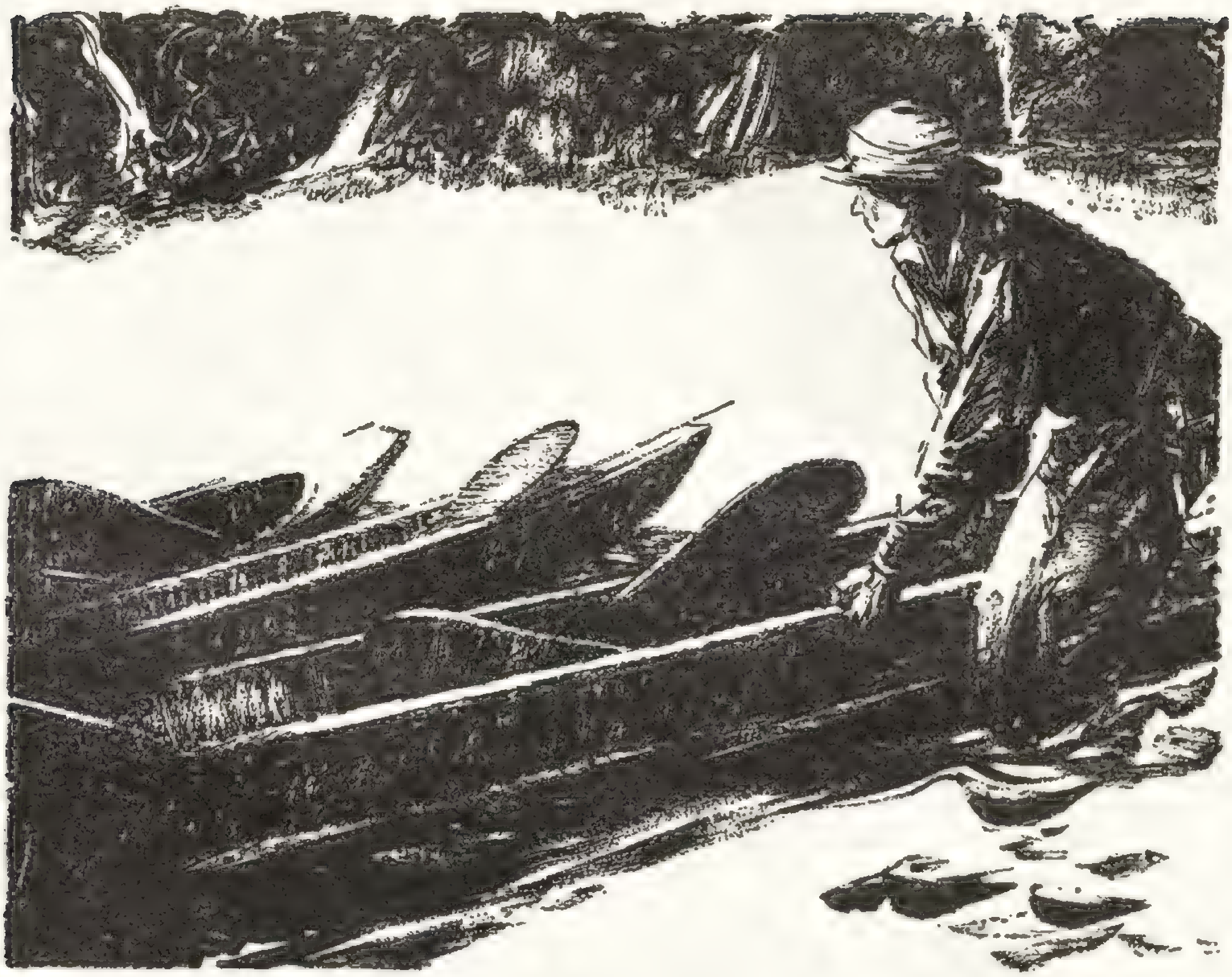
Fleeing the camp, Driscoll was arrested by an English speaking voice from a hut on the edge of the clearing. He approached and discovered a captive white man, totally blind and horribly mutilated about the face with gashes inflicted by the savages. The captive told Driscoll that his life had been spared in the first place only because his head was utterly devoid of hair, much esteemed by the savages on the head of a victim; and now allowed to live because he was thought to be mad, and hence taboo. The man mysteriously refused to tell Driscoll his name, the American thereafter mentally labeling him Scar Face.

Scar Face directed Driscoll to go to a sacred hut, some distance away, in which a young native was indulging in the "devil dream", a primitive rite of preparation for manhood. There, the blind man told Driscoll, he could hide out until his ankle grew strong enough to walk. Scar Face then hinted that it would be to Driscoll's advantage that he get him—Scar Face—out of the camp when his strength was restored.

The American did as he was directed and, at the sacred hut, he was forced to kill the devil dreamer when the native attacked him.

At the end of a week Driscoll was himself again. He returned to the Jivero camp and succeeded in getting Scar Face away—but only after the old men

of the Amazon Jungle



on guard had been repulsed by pistol fire. The blind man had a dugout hidden away, and the fugitives made off in it.

Two days later Scar Face told Driscoll to be on the lookout for a sugarloaf rock at a bend in the stream. The American complied, and soon espied the landmark. As they floated around the bend, however, Driscoll suddenly put in for the bank. The stream ahead bore a long line of native canoes, each heavily loaded.

That night Driscoll reconnoitered the savages' camp. He estimated their number at seventy and told Scar Face that they should try to sneak away in one of the provisioned dugouts of the Jiveros. The blind man was derisive.

"Think again," he said. "Seventy men out there, and how many shots in our locker?"

Driscoll's fingers felt along his belt. "Thirteen. And six in the gun makes nineteen."

"Unlucky numbers. Forget it."

WITH another derisive chuckle Scar Face moved a few inches, took a new position and relaxed. In another minute he was breathing with the soft, slow regularity of tranquil slumber.

Driscoll, too, changed position and settled down. But after a few breaths he lifted his head once more. He was hungry enough, tired enough, uncomfortable enough to be irritably restless and somewhat reckless. The quick dusk now had become impenetrable darkness near at hand. But over at the river edge glimmered a faint sheen of firelight, visible through the low bushes, and along the ground drifted thin wood smoke. For a little longer he lay hesitant; then, jaw tightening, he crept forth from his thicket.

Free, he crawled a few feet riverward. Then, pausing, he sat up and spent a long minute fixing in mind the location of this particular bush. Just how he did so, just what prompted him to try to do so, he did not know. Something, somewhere, somehow influenced him to halt when he did, do what he did, remain there until he felt sure that he could come unerringly back through darkness to this spot. Unthinkingly he was coming to depend more and more on that faculty strongest in birds, beasts and primitive men, weakest in schooled products of civilization, the so-called sixth sense—the perception which, independent of sight, sound, smell, touch or taste, enables a man to go where he should go, stop where he should stop, move again when he should move. When the same strange prompting moved him again, Driscoll went forward.

He went now on his feet, not on hands and knees. Stepping slowly, listening keenly, he stole toward the vague firelight. As he advanced he heard an increasing murmur of guttural voices, low, yet unguarded. And when he reached the projecting point around which the river swept, the point where stood the sugarloaf rock and the lofty oilwood tree, he found no sentinel stationed there. Satisfied that they had the place all to themselves, the Jiveros at present gave no thought to anything but their bellies.

Along the arc of sand burned seven fires, around each of which grouped savages, eating wolfishly, muttering, growling, sometimes snarling at one another like animals. From those fires floated smells of roasting meat, broiling fish, baking plantains, which made the hungry white man's mouth water.

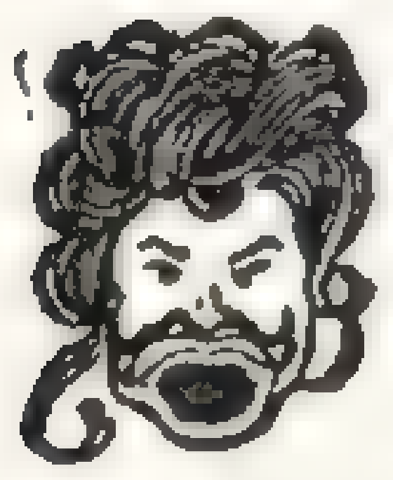
At the blaze nearest him, however, the squatting eaters had no flesh, fish or fowl; they munched morosely on *nauma,* a mess of boiled and mashed manioc, which they extracted with sticks from a huge clay pot. Among them was an unusually big fellow who, although chewing the same frugal fare, seemed to be chief of the whole party; for he occasionally looked with an air of authority along the line of other fires, and once grunted sharply at some nearby disputants, who immediately stopped talking. On this group Driscoll's gaze rested curiously a moment; then lifting, ranged along the whole beach.

The canoes, drawn well up on the shore, were huddled together like sleeping river beasts, side by side; not easy to dislodge, or, at present, approachable. Their owners, although off guard, were equipped to defend them at any instant; for behind the eaters stood their tall *chonta* lances, fixed erect in the sand, and close beside them lay their circular *kamaka* wood shields. Eyeing that long array of murderous weapons, listening to the rumble of harsh voices, Driscoll shook his head. But he did not withdraw.

Several men from the fires of the meat eaters came leisurely ambling toward the vegetarians. Others, alone or in pairs, followed at intervals until a score or more stood near, leaning on their lances, saying nothing, idly waiting. Between these and the stolid squatters was a noticeable difference in neatness and color. The standers—and all others at the farther fires—were light brown; their thick black hair, gathered in the three tribal pigtails, was carefully combed; their ear tubes, habitually worn in the lobes, were adjusted at the correct downward slant; their *itipis* and *awangeamas* — loin aprons and shoulder wraps—were manifestly clean. The feeders at the chief's fire, including the chief himself, were exceedingly unclean, and coal-black.

Black as the hinges of Hades and ugly as dirty demons were those who ate the manioc. Hair awry and matted; faces and bodies filthy; clothes torn and smeared; even their lances, standing at their backs, stained with dried blood—they were just as they had emerged from battle. The blackness was that of the *sua* war dye; the blood that of their victims; the dirt, sweat and other defilements were those of the fight and the trail. Not until these men should reach home and undergo the prescribed ceremony of purification could they wash themselves or their weapons; nor for some time thereafter could they eat meat. Otherwise they would suffer a dire fate at the hands of vengeful ghosts. These were the warriors who not only had killed but also had captured and brought away human heads.

Those heads now came forth from darkness to the firelight. The black fighters ceased eating, arose, walked together to the chief's canoe, brought back a long wicker basket; and from it each picked a small round object whence hung long hair. With the sure quickness of long practise each also grasped a fire stained section of an old broken clay pot, scooped up sand, set his piece of clay at the fire edge. Then, shedding their shoulder cloths, they squatted and studiously worked. The lighter, cleaner men, who had won no bloody booty, stood watching enviously.



ALTHOUGH the grisly trophies had already been considerably shrunken at other night camps, the process was not yet complete; and the victors toiled as carefully as if they had but just stripped the faces and scalps from the warm skulls. Holding the up-ended heads like open bags, they poured the hot sand into the hollow necks, deftly tilted the heads at differing slants to insure even action of the heat, dumped the sand out when it cooled, and reheated it in the clay shells. When hot, it was put in again to resume its work of gradual shrinkage and hardening.

And so it went, in and out, repeatedly returning to the fire. At each emptying of the gruesome little skin sacks, the workmen scraped the interiors with wooden knives; then, by pinching and pressing, molded the faces with their hard fingers, striving to reduce every feature in exact proportion.

Absorbed in his own task, each worker gave scant attention to any other, and none at all to the silent idlers. Only the chief, fashioning his latest trophy with skill betokening experience with more than one similar product, found time to cast critical looks at the handiwork of his near companions and, by occasional gruff grunts, to correct slight errors of manipulation. Once he roundly reprimanded one young savage, evidently doing his first job, for allowing his sand to grow so hot as to cause a smell of scorching.

Such overheating of the drying scalp might cause the hair to fall out, thus destroying the value of the head so hard won and highly treasured; for, since the major object of the Jivero headhunter is to make the slain enemy his slave forever, and since the physical and mental strength of that ghostly slave supposedly resides largely in his hair, the dropping away of that hair is a bad omen.

To the warrior who preserves both hair and head intact, who shrinks the face so skilfully that the dead man can be recognized at sight, and who afterward complies with every detail of inordinately long drawn ceremonies, will come great increase of crops, animals, women, children, physical prowess and length of life. To him who bungles his preservative job will come much less obedience from the ghost, whose vigor and intelligence would otherwise redouble his own. And, since the power of any fighting chief depends not only on his own strength but on that of his followers, he will, if wise, help every recruit to become stronger. So, by harsh criticism, did this one.

Up and down went the hot or cooled sand, round and round went the gradually shrinking heads, infinitesimally smaller grew the pinched features in the weird craftsmanship handed down through forgotten centuries by some unholy religion—a religion as unknown to the present day as that of the sunken continent of Atlantis, and a craft virtually unknown to any other savages of the present world. To the zealous toilers time passed unmeasured. To the watchers it grew tedious. Gradually dispersing, they returned to their own camp-fires, rejoining their fellows who had been too soured by disappointment to come and contemplate the success of the winners of heads. After awhile the workers were left alone. And after a longer while they too yielded to fatigue.

One by one they ceased their labors, deposited the little heads in the basket, put in their individual pieces of clay pot with equal care, pulled on their shoulder cloths and lay back and slept, feet to the fire. Presently none was awake except the chief. He, strongest of all, worked on alone, adding expert touches to his own grim plunder; then he yawned, laid his trophy in the tray, arose and scanned the sands and everything around.

Down the line the fires had sunk to steadily glowing spots of red. From the sands the slim grove of spears had vanished; every savage had, before sleeping, unearthed his weapon, and now lay with one hand on its butt. At the riverside the snouts of the dugouts rested, almost invisible, their outer lengths lost in utter blackness. From the jungle came few sounds, faint, far off, inhuman. The roving gaze of the commander swung to the point where lurked the white spy.

Instantly that spy ducked his head, shut his eyes, strove to think of something else, and thus to break any current of sensation between him and that lone mind beyond; the mind which, now dissociated from other considerations, strove by every faculty to sense any menace. For some minutes he remained thus frozen, though keenly listening. Then, looking up and out again, he drew a long breath. The last Jivero had lain down.

Feet to the fire, one fist curled around his lance butt, the chief lay like his men. The basket of heads, close beside him, rested within the ring of sleeping conquerors, guarded by brawny bodies ready to leap awake at the slightest sinister sound. Not until morning would that ghoulish treasure be replaced in the leading dugout; for between now and then something or other might possibly happen to those canoes, which, with the odd improvidence common to otherwise canny South American savages, had been left unmoored.

The same thought came to the hidden white man. Something might indeed happen to at least one of those canoes; something which had been in his mind before he left his bush. His eyes went again to the huddled boats, and in them grew a reckless gleam. Then his gaze roved again along the beach, studying the smoldering fires and the semi-visible shapes motionless around them.

All were evidently asleep; the chief, nearest, last to succumb to fatigue, now was loudly snoring. Yet something warned the lurking schemer that the faintest footfall on those open sands would alarm subconsciously listening minds, and bring a score of men to their haunches, alert; and one yell would yank the whole hellish gang to its feet. After that—

Again Driscoll shook his head. But then into his eyes came a new glint. He turned and crawled to the upriver side of the stony point. In the blackness of that side he unbuckled his gun belt and slid it under a bit of brush. Then he quietly walked into the inky water and gave himself to the silent current. Slowly stroking, he floated around the point and on downstream.

To the possibilities that an unseen snake might strike when he stowed his belt under that bush, that a crocodile or stingray or electric eel might kill him in the water, he gave no thought. Neither did he think of the blind Scar Face and of his miserable fate if his guide did not come back. He thought of nothing at all except his present adventure. To sneak a better boat away from a horde of killers, take a slim chance of getting away with it, laugh in his beard at the savage world around him—that, to Jeff Driscoll, was life; the sort of life which had made him an erratic drifter in South America rather than a bullied employee in North America. So now, forgetful of all else, he drifted down the black river to try his luck once more and find out what might happen next.

CHAPTER IX

A DEMON SPEAKS

AJIVERO suddenly sat up.

To his ears had come a faint grinding sound. Suspiciously he peered about and listened. Now he heard nothing. The noise had ceased the instant he moved.

On the sands was no upright shape. Along the pallid curve the smoldering fires glowed redly. From the jungle side gleamed no eyes of hungry jaguars. At the beach edge all canoes were in place. After a long moment of intent survey the savage relaxed, shoved another chunk of wood on his adjacent fire, lay back, slept again.

When he was once more unconscious the grinding sound recommenced. One of the heavy canoes rocked slowly from side to side, creeping outward at every scrape of sand. At its far end, shoulder deep in black water, Driscoll, a phantom figure, cunningly toiled to draw the vessel free. From time to time he halted abruptly as some other savage started up at some other dull fire; then, long after that figure lay down, he resumed work.

At length the reluctantly moving dugout floated, soundless, downstream. And, with less noise than the familiar splash of a fish, Driscoll hauled himself up over a blunt end and slid down inside the smooth shell. There he rested except for one brief motion. That motion was the rise of a hand to a nose and the derisive flicker of four fingers at the receding seventy savages.

In that canoe was booty gleaned from six others—articles left behind by the careless natives on the beach. The ghostly robber from the river had taken his time, inspecting every boat, choosing the best, and then gathering from the others whatever he deemed worth taking. Now he had a goodly supply of dry but nourishing food, some of which already rested in his previously empty stomach; a fish spear, a strong bow and numerous arrows, a couple of well woven hammocks and four excellent paddles—twice as many as he needed, but none too many if one or two should later be lost. After one harrowing example of the consequences of losing paddles, Driscoll was not inclined to undergo any like experience.

When the fires behind had shrunk to mere dots of light in the dark, he put one of those paddles to use. Silently he steered the canoe across the river; then, catching the eddy of the far shore, swerved and stroked softly upstream. As the distant fires came again abeam he paused long enough to grin and once more thumb his nose. Thereafter he swung onward until those lights were far astern; cut across the current, coasted down and came to rest above the conical rock whence he had started his daring swim.

Wedging his captured craft between snags, he stepped ashore; found his gun belt, stole across the point and looked down once more on the line of sleepers. So far as he could see, none of them was awake; and certainly none was aware of the loss of one canoe and the looting of the others.

The theft of the dugout had been almost too easy; so cleverly managed, so completely successful, that it had but whetted an inborn appetite for action. Now Driscoll felt a quixotic impulse to satiate that appetite by stealing also the basket of shrunken heads, knocking the chief senseless when he awoke, shoving off downriver and giving the slip to the swarming horde striving to catch him in the dark. But he put down that momentary urge and turned away. Over in the black bush awaited a responsibility.

Stealthily creeping, keenly studying his course, Driscoll reached that responsibility. At the first touch of his hand Scar Face sprang awake. But at the chuckling narration of what Driscoll had done, the blind man snarled like an angered savage.

"You damned fool!" he rasped. "Why in hell did you do that?"

Driscoll stared, snapped back—

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because we'll have the whole troop hunting us now!"

"Let 'em hunt. If we shove off now we'll be a long way downstream by daybreak."

"Who wants to be downstream at daybreak? Not I! And what good will that do us? D'you think we can outpaddle that gang, even with a long start? And d'you think they won't come after us? Oh, what a bonehead!"

"Cut out the fancy names!" growled Driscoll. "Maybe you're right about their chasing us. But we can hide up some side creek for a week if we want to, and—"

"And of course they'd never think of that!" sneered the other. "And of course they can't spend a week—or a month—hunting for us. Time means nothing to them. They— Hm!"

He stopped with a short grunt, as if hit by some new thought. For several breaths he sat silent. Then he muttered:

"That might work. We'll have to try it, anyway."

"What?"

"I'll show you. First we must get out of here. Lead the way—and don't forget to go softly!"

"O. K. Keep close."

SOBERED, fully aware now of the probable consequences of his venturesome foray, Driscoll began creeping again riverward, making every move with utmost caution. Behind, with equal stealth, the blind man crawled, frequently touching a foot of his pilot. That recurrent touch made Driscoll feel more and more the other's helpless dependence on him and realize more keenly his own selfish rashness in gambling his life and that of his companion for a log canoe. The game had not been worth the candle; and he was, he told himself, just what Scar Face had called him—a damned fool, whose folly now was involving them both in a nasty jam. If the blind fellow could find a way out of this mess he, Driscoll, would use some sense thereafter.

So acutely did these unusual self-reproaches gnaw at him that by the time he reached the river he was in a nervous sweat. Not once had he or his follower made a blunder in their cautious creep; but now, with the canoe at hand, he felt like jumping in, pulling Scar Face aboard, shoving out and paddling headlong away, reckless of noise. Instead, he forced himself to guide the blind man quietly into the shell, hand him a paddle, then turn about and walk to where he could again view the beach. There he stood, surveying the sunken fires and the partially visible figures along the sand.

All were quiet. His gaze swung to the canoes, now hardly discernible in the faint light of the low fires. And suddenly his recent contrite resolutions began to crumble under the onslaught of a new hazardous idea; an inspiration which, though risky, was not devoid of shrewd sense. He had gotten away with one dugout. Why not with the others? Why not float softly down, have Scar Face hold this boat at the far end of the beach—it was pitch-dark there—and, himself, swim up and neatly work the six other shells adrift? Thus the whole savage gang would be left stranded, unable to pursue.

As the idea gripped him, imagination flamed high. His eyes dwelt again on the basket of heads. Those things were worth money at museums up home; maybe a hundred dollars each. There were about twenty of them here; two thousand dollars. Just a cunning sneak across the sand—and if anybody woke up, a sprint and dive and swim . . .

At that moment some one did wake up. It was the chief.

Suddenly as an aroused snake, he lifted head and body erect. And, with snaky intentness, he sat swiftly surveying everything before him. His glance darted first to the tray of heads; then down along the shore. Before he could gather all details and swing to the point where the white man schemed, that white man was retreating, his fervid dream expiring like a drenched fire.

The abrupt arising of the guardian of the ghoulish treasure, just when a near enemy coveted it, was too coincident to be mere accident. As he sneaked back to the waiting dugout, Driscoll realized anew the deadly danger of tempting fate too far. And as he crept aboard he whispered:

"Quiet! The chief's awake."

Scar Face made no sound. For several minutes both were motionless. Once Driscoll thought he heard something move slyly up above, where he had been. But against the vague light at the crest he could see nothing, and presently he felt that anything which might have been there was gone. With a slow push he moved the craft out from the snags.

"Straight out!" then whispered Scar Face. "Across the river!"

Silently the paddles sank, and with strong, noiseless strokes the smooth bellied log rode out across the current. From behind came no yell of discovery. Soon the canoe, borne downward by drift, was well outside the point, and once more the fires came into view. But the black boat on the black river now was invisible to even the keenest eyes back there, if any were watching. Driscoll let his paddle drag alongside.

"We're out," he said, low toned. "Now what?"

"Quiet! To the other shore!"

The blind man's paddle swung with the same force. Driscoll resumed his own stroke. Farther receded the lights; nearer came a loom of more solid black than that on the river. Presently the pilot backed water. Just ahead towered the inky jungle.

"Hold it!" he warned.

They drifted. Scar Face rested, breathing hard; then, unexpectedly, he chuckled and spoke genially.

"While you were at it, you wild marauder, you did steal a good boat," he complimented. "After that crazy shell we had, this feels like a ship."

Surprised, pleased, Driscoll eyed him smilingly.

"Glad you feel that way about it," he returned. "And any time you want to eat, there's plenty."

"I'll do that soon. But now—are we abreast the beach fires?"

"Just about."

Scar Face chuckled.

"All right. Keep quiet and watch."

Scar Face straightened up and turned his sightless face toward the far shore. For a few seconds he sat motionless, gathering inner forces, becoming outwardly rigid. Then from him came a hollow, solemn tone, utterly unlike the usual voice of Scar Face. Low, yet far reaching, it croaked a single word:

"Zayaki!"

Seconds passed, silent.

"Zayaki!" repeated the sepulchral voice.

"Hah?"

The responsive ejaculation came from the distant sands; quick, hard, truculent, yet with an undernote of alarm. For no logical reason, Driscoll felt that it came from the Jivero chief; that the name of that chief was Zayaki; and that, although he had caught the call when first uttered, he had withheld answer because of habitual wariness and superstitious awe.

FOR a measured interval Scar Face also held back further words. Then, with deepening inflections that somehow made even Driscoll feel chilly, he spoke a slow, short sentence. To the big man it meant nothing. But to listeners across the inky water it evidently meant much.

When the croaking words stopped, back shot a terse query in the tones of Zayaki—tones raised half an octave and full of haste. At the same time all the low fires began to sputter tiny sparks and gradually increase their light.

For another deliberately gaged length of time Scar Face held his tongue. The far flames grew bigger and brighter, and on the pale sand Driscoll could see dark shapes moving with the activity of suddenly aroused ants. The blind man, of course, saw nothing. But, more accurately than many men gifted with physical vision, he chose his next moment to strike. Then, with sonorous sounds, he again spoke.

Slow, portentous, full of hard consonants, his voice beat across the black waste of water, uttering perhaps a hundred aboriginal words. Then it died. And although a hammering medley of shouts rapped back, he said no more.

The canoe floated on. The babel of distant yells swelled into a panicky roar. The black ants ran together, stood in a mass, howled frantically at the unresponsive night. Gradually they and their fires and their beach diminished, to vanish all at once as the drifting dugout swung around a forested turn of the river.

Driscoll turned puzzled eyes on his partner, who relaxed from his taut poise. In a tired tone Scar Face asked—

"What did they do?"

"Scurried around as if they were scared witless, and yelped—you heard that—but they didn't take after us."

"Good. Now I'll eat, if you'll hand me something."

"O. K. But what's the idea of that speech you made?"

The other chuckled.

"I am a demon," he explained. "I am the ghost of one Lopaqui, an old chief, grandfather of this Chief Zayaki. I come from the world of shadows to warn my grandson. Evil spirits and evil men threaten his people. A powerful sorcerer has made a river spirit swallow one of his canoes; he must guard the others until day, then speed home to defend his settlement. Unless he reaches it very soon, it will be destroyed by enemies now marching toward it. The defenders will be beheaded, the women captured, the children killed, the animals eaten, the house burned, the plantation uprooted, the water poisoned. And on him will be a curse because he let all this happen. He will lose all the heads he has taken and die in misery, and his name will be a stench in the noses of all who knew him. That's about all. But I think it'll be plenty. Here's hoping."

With another short laugh he began chewing manioc.

Driscoll nodded. If the Jiveros believed the ghostly warning, it should indeed be plenty. And their excitement had proved that for the present, at least, they were swallowing the dire prophecy whole. Steeped in superstition, congenitally fearful of ghosts, demons and human enemies as merciless as themselves, they were naturally predisposed to accept the sepulchral voice from the night as demoniac. If their faith in it lasted until dawn—now not far away—they then would undoubtedly make all speed homeward, giving no further thought to the canoe swallowed by the river devil.

Yet, between now and then, some sharp eyed savage, not too worried to think, might wonder why that river devil had stolen travel equipment from other canoes, yet left those boats unswallowed. Such small thievery would be unworthy of a gigantic fiend. And, with minds once set on that trail after plentiful argument, the whole fierce gang might—

"Of course, the stunt may not work," calmly said Scar Face, evidently thinking along the same lines. "But what could be done has been done. Now watch for some little creek where we can lie up and sleep, will you? We might as well. If they come after us, they'll get us anyway; and if they don't, we can go back when they've gone and we've rested."

The listener's gaze narrowed again.

"Oh, yes," he drawled. "Go back—for what?"

Scar Face made no answer. Dim in the gloom, he chewed again on the manioc.

"What's the big attraction about that place?" asked Driscoll. "You told me to find it, and I found it. You gave me hell because I took a big chance to get ourselves away from it. And now that we're away, with a decent chance to keep going, you want to go back. What for?"

Scar Face continued eating. The canoe floated on downstream. At length the blind man leaned overside, cupped up several drinks in hollowed palms, straightened, wiped his lips on a forearm; then deliberately lay back and composed himself to rest.

"When you find that creek let me know," tranquilly bade Scar Face. "Meanwhile, I'll sleep some more. Sorry to keep you up so late. But that's the penalty of having eyes—and a damned inquisitive disposition."

Driscoll turned from him, sank his paddle again and coasted slowly along the bank, seeking a spot where he could turn in and take his own rest. He had had no sleep now for some twenty hours.

Peering hard at the inky wall at his left, listening intently for any sound of inflowing water, feeling the eddy with his paddle, he stroked slowly onward. Not an opening could he find. Not the narrowest slit in the solid forest caught his strained sight; not the weakest side current made itself heard or felt. The river here flowed in short curves, and the homeless boat crawled around one turn after another, traveling, perhaps, a mile an hour. Then suddenly it stopped.

An abrupt backswash of the guiding paddle halted it. After a breathless second that paddle swung it hard inshore. The paddler seized a projecting bush. For several more seconds he squatted rigid, holding the boat against the earth. Then, low but imperative, he muttered to the blind man:

"Hey, ghost! Wake up!"

Just ahead, faintly lighting another curve of sand similar to the one they had left behind, burned a string of low fires. On that beach was camping another horde of savages.

CHAPTER X

BLOODHOUNDS

"HOW many fires?"

Scar Face, aroused and warned, asked the question in his harsh whisper.

"Ten. No—twelve," answered Driscoll, recounting the spots of flame.

"Any one stirring?"

"Can't see anybody. We can probably drift by. But first we'll have to sneak back and swing away out. Ready?"

"Wait awhile."

The man aft sat quiet, shoulders hunched, bald head drooping in thought. The one forward watched the fires.

"About what time is it?" then queried Scar Face.

"Pretty late. Maybe near morning," was Driscoll's vague guess.

He had no watch, and no clear estimate of the number of hours recently elapsed. How much time had passed while he watched the head shrinking and worked the canoe away was beyond judgment. And the weak moon, which hitherto had lent faint aid, was absent, dead or buried by thick clouds. The night remained black.

"All right. Let's go."

Scar Face spoke now with an odd sigh, as if reluctant. And his paddle, when he used it, moved rather slowly.

After a few strokes, however, he worked with decisive force, no longer hesitant. Skilfully turned, the dugout swam back around the protective curve. There Scar Face prompted:

"Away across. Then down the far side. Tell me when we're abreast of them."

"Huh? What for? Not going to talk again, are you?"

"I am. And I hate to do it."

The low voice was somber. Driscoll frowned.

"But what—"

A sudden shove of the stern paddle jerked the canoe and silenced him. The stubborn fellow behind would say no more now, and would do what he had determined upon. Without further demur Driscoll swung his own blade.

Across the current glided the pair, and on into the farther gloom. Sidewise drift carried them downward in the crossing; and when they neared the other shore the camp-fires were abeam. One of them suddenly darkened, then gave out increasing light. Somebody had just thrown on fresh fuel. Driscoll peered hard. Had a keen ear over there caught the virtually noiseless repetition of swishing strokes on the outer water?

Evidently not. No other glow grew greater. No activity was visible or audible. The fellow who had tossed that wood on the coals probably was already dropping off again to sleep.

"Are we there?" questioned Scar Face.

"Uh-huh," admitted Driscoll, checking the canoe. "And all's quiet. But what d'you expect to—"

"Oh, shut up!"

With that the sightless visage turned toward the distant savages. Without hesitation the blind man voiced a deep call.

For a moment no answer came. Then sounded a short, sharp bark, challenging, inquiring. At once Scar Face replied.

Several times he spoke. Driscoll, watching the far shore, but listening to the voice so near, shot one queer glance at the speaker. That voice, although solemn, differed much from the one which had foretold disaster to the head-hunters upriver. That one had croaked with a hollow, calamitous note. This one held a forceful resonance, vigorous and confident.

While Scar Face talked, the dull fires swiftly brightened. When he stopped, a deep chested voice hurled back a belligerent question. Scar Face retorted curtly. Then, with a slow shove of his paddle, he moved the dugout again downstream.

"Watch them!" he ordered in an undertone. "Keep going—but don't lose them yet."

With a quick survey of the surroundings, Driscoll obeyed. Paddling and watching, he gaged the activity aroused by the mysterious voice.

THE flames now blazed high. On the sands quickly moved many little black creatures, excited but apparently not scared. Instead, they seemed to be forming two rows and starting some queer, rhythmic motion forward and back. Soon there was no doubt of this. The lines were plain on the bright beach. They moved toward each other, retreated, advanced, withdrew in regular cadence. And now across the nightbound water rumbled male voices in chorus—monotonous, unmusical, beating in a measured chant.

"Ah!" gloated Scar Face. "The *adendrata!*"

"Whatever that is," muttered Driscoll.

"War chant. Chant of warriors taking the trail. Are they moving back and forth in two lines?"

"Yes."

"Doing the *enekma.* That's the preliminary war dance, brandishing spears. All right. Now we can go get some sleep. Anywhere downstream will do. Shove along!"

The blind man now talked in a normal voice, sure he could not be heard by the vociferous performers. His final command snapped, as if he were suddenly out of sorts. Driscoll gave him another glance, looked again across the river, but made no move to obey.

"I don't feel like shoving just now," he refused. "First I want to get the general idea through my skull. Whose trail are those hellions going on? Why did you wake 'em up? Let's have it."

"You're certainly thick!" retorted Scar Face. "Who do you think they are?"

"Headhunters, of course. Going home, like the other gang."

"Going home, hell! They're pursuing that gang—out for that gang's blood. Understand now?"

Driscoll's tired eyes widened. Yes, he understood now, quite completely. This second horde comprised kinsmen of the slaughtered victims whose shrunken heads he had seen, and they had taken the blood trail of vengeance with unusual celerity. Or, perhaps, they were some band unaware of that raid, who, out on an unrelated expedition, had chanced on traces of those retreating victors and followed them up. In either case, they could not have known how near they were to their quarry; else they would have pressed on to attack earlier in the night. Now, informed and incited by whatever friendly demon Scar Face had just impersonated, they would lose no more time than their ritual demanded. Then—

He grinned thinly. Twelve fires there; seven upriver. Unless these trailers bungled their approach, things were going to be just too bad for the bloody brutes up there, caught by surprise, outnumbered almost two to one. And, anyway, Zayaki's gang now would never follow the spurious ghost which had pilfered from their canoes.

"You sure use your head, fellow," he said.

"I have to."

The answering tone seemed glum. Driscoll eyed his partner askance.

"What are you down in the mouth about?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't like this!" Scar Face scowled toward the savages he had just aroused. "It had to be done, but— Oh well, it's done. Let's go."

"No hurry. What d'you mean by that?"

"I mean I don't like being a traitor, a betrayer, a sneaking voice that— Oh, I'm a damn fool! Getting soft. Weak as water. Forget it!"

Sinking his paddle, the speaker gave the drifting canoe a hard forward shove. Driscoll bore back on his own blade, checking the blind impulse, peering again at the sightless man. Soon he nodded, comprehending much unsaid.

Although this ex-captive had lost eyes and face in a Jivero trap, had been spared his life only because he had no hair, had preserved that life only by stubborn will and cunning wits, had known that at any time he might be callously slain by habitual murderers grown tired of him—in spite of all this and, perhaps, of many physical or mental cruelties, he still remembered that those people had let him live; had housed him, fed him, protected him, as they protected pigs or hens, while they considered him possibly useful.

And now, somehow, he felt disloyal, treacherous, despicable, because he had loosed on the home warriors a deadly pack of outsiders. The feeling was irrational, nonsensical—but admirable. And Driscoll, who had turned back on a black trail to prove himself loyal to an apparently useless prisoner, understood.

His spoken answer, however, was gruff.

"'Soft' is right," he said. "You're getting old, or something. Want me to put you ashore while I go back?"

The dim shape behind him sat rigid, seeming to stare.

"Go back?" Scar Face echoed. "Now? What do you mean?"

"Oh, I've just taken the notion to see what happens next. This gang's going to shove off soon, and there'll be a good show when they mix up with the outfit above.

"They won't be looking back, and it'll be easy enough to trail along. And, as you were saying awhile ago, I've got a damned inquisitive disposition. If you want to get ashore and sleep some more, now's your time to say so. I'm not sleepy yet."

The other sat silent for a long minute. In that minute the chant over the water ended. Driscoll, looking across, saw the long lines break into a mass rushing for the waterside, where, invisible at this distance, must lie the beached black boats.

Then Scar Face said, with new vigor:

"You're a liar. You're dead on your paddle. Also you're crazy as hell. But if you insist on going back, I'm not holding you."

And, with a sidewise stroke, he swung the stern inward, the bow out, turning the canoe again upstream. At once the bowman's paddle took a new hold on the water. Without another word the two stroked up the easy eddy along the black shore.

Over the river, the black dots vanished from the pale sands. The forsaken fires flamed untended.

Soundless as swimming snakes, the hunters of heads glided up the eastern side of the black stream to find their prey. Equally quiet, two ghosts stole upward amid the western shadow, unseen, unsuspected. And, contrary to the assertion of the second ghost, the first one was not dead on his paddle. Although his strained eyes burned and his fatigued muscles lagged, he stroked with steady strength and purpose. He knew his comrade yearned, for some reason still unexplained, to return to the point of the sugarloaf and the oilwood.

And Driscoll himself could not rest now until he saw this night through. Silent, the pair who had started the machinery of havoc went back to meet the new dawn.

CHAPTER XI

ATTACK

ON THE curving sands just below the conical rock a tired but incessantly moving circle revolved around dying fires: A ring of brawny men, some smeared with dried blood, yet all behaving like scared children, clutching hands to sustain common courage. From their throats rasped a hoarse litany, repetitive, stereotyped, yet, supposedly, magically preventive of disaster. They were performing the *hantsemata,* the dolorous Jivero ceremony which differs as widely from the inspiring *enekma* and *adendrata* as the tolling of funeral bells from the impelling call of a bugle.

"*Masteitmi!*
They can not kill!
"*Mandoastatami!*
They will not conquer!
"*Uitatai!*
They will run away!
"*Hinikitai!*
We shall keep our lives!"

Over and over they vociferated the rigmarole, as continuously as their shell shaking women on the hidden upstream creek had reiterated the charm meant to bring back these men victorious. Whether it had been begun by order of their chief, or by common impulse, did not matter now. Once under way, it must not be halted until daybreak banished all gloom.

Straight across the river, a canoe lay beside a dark bank. In it two white men sat wordless, gripping bushes. Between this boat and the fanatical Jiveros was nothing but empty, inky water, streaked by the faint flames. A dozen other dugouts, which had sneaked upward ahead of this one, had vanished somewhere as if engulfed by some sucking whirlpool. Where and why and how they had disappeared was a mystery impenetrable as the depths of the opaque river and jungle.

Wearily, drearily the *hantsemata* swung on. From forest and stream came no other sound. Then, at last, a weak gray light crept across the uppermost sky, to strengthen rapidly above, permeate all below with a deathly pallor. Night was done. Day was coming. Dawn was here.

With a final dull note the dancers stopped and stood breathing hard, rallying depleted reserve strength for long hours of grueling boat work. In the canoe across the water a bearded man scowled and hurriedly scanned the near forest, seeking better cover. Then—

Sudden as a serpent, death struck at the drooping Jiveros.

Somewhere sounded a single shout, clear and hard as a trumpet note. Instantly the green jungle edge vomited brown assailants. And from the river, just behind the huddled canoes, erupted more fierce shapes. With a bloodcurdling blare of triumphant yells both divisions charged, long lances leveled at the dumfounded company caught between them.

Driscoll's head jerked up. Jubilantly he exclaimed:

"Boy! They're at it!"

"So I heard," dryly returned Scar Face.

Then both were quiet, tensely following the ensuing combat.

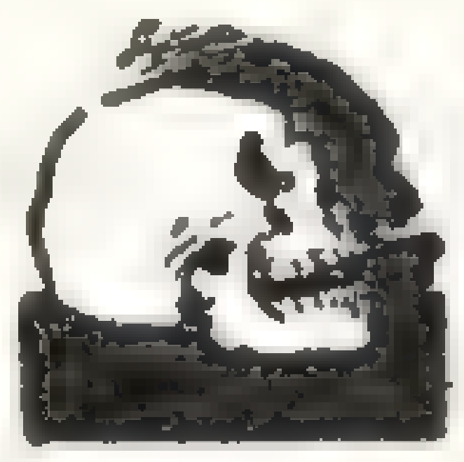
The mysterious disappearance of the downriver force was comprehensible now. Cunningly they had grounded their boats somewhere, divided their force, crept through forest or swum silently up the shore eddy; hidden among trees or, up to necks in water, behind the dugouts; then, impervious to chill as lurking reptiles, waited gloatingly while their tiring prey exhausted still more strength in ceremonial dancing.

Of their own success they were positive; they had performed their own requisite ritual of *enekma*, and knew that the desperate dance of the *hantsemata* by these outnumbered foes could not prevail against it. Counting heads, greedily visioning the forthcoming massacre, they could well afford to wait. So they had waited until the last minute. And now, leaping to their kill, they grinned like wolves charging a flock of sheep.

For one flitting instant the smaller force stood gaping as if they truly were sheep. Their defensive rite had been directed against enemies far off, menacing their home. This astounding attack against themselves stunned thought and motion into numbness. But for only one second were they easy game. In the next breath they became cornered jaguars.

Instinctively every man of them sprinted to his own spear and shield, left lying beside his fire. And before the onrushing lances could plunge into unarmed bodies, the snatched weapons were parrying and thrusting in mad counter attack.

Thereafter raged hell. Ferocious bellowings rose in a crescendo of increasing agony, reached a shrill top note of utter anguish, subsided into individual screams, died out into silence. Slowly, scattered shapes stood up, walked about, drew together, became a mass of victors; a very small mass. From end to end of the beach lay a jumble of motionless bodies.



VICTORY was with the assailants; and many heads for those able to collect them. But that victory had cost much. The former holders of the beach, caught in the jaws of swiftly closing pincers, unable to flee to either jungle or river, had died to the last man. But recognizing their inability to escape, they had fought with the fury of desperation. Now, out of the hundred-odd who had attacked them, hardly more than a dozen still were on their legs.

In the light of the swiftly rising sun those few survivors contemplated their spoils. From them rose an inarticulate ululation of triumph. Swinging aloft their red lances, stabbing at imaginary opponents, prancing with impromptu leaps and whirls, they rioted in tumultuous celebration. Many of their spear thrusts were not wasted on empty air, but were directed at enemy corpses. Veritable maniacs, they reveled in a gory orgy which ceased only with exhaustion of breath.

Then, sobering somewhat, they went about the collection of trophies. From the canoes of the dead men they gathered stone axes and hardwood knives; and with these they began a methodical removal of heads. For awhile, as the sun rolled above the jungle wall and flooded river and shore with radiance, the choppers worked without dissension; each knew his own recent antagonists and took their heads unquestioned.

But then arose violent disagreement. Many corpses, still not decapitated, had been bereft of life by assailants, who in turn had perished in the battle. Every greedy survivor coveted this ownerless booty. And sour grunts grew into angry rumbles, rumbles into harsh dispute, dispute into yelling, glaring quarrels bordering on fights. Red axes rose, knives were poised, reddened bodies poised warily, voices bawled.

But, for all the noise, no actual conflicts occurred. Their chief, who could have quelled the contention by one word, was dead. But every rapacious brawler knew he must not kill his fellow tribesman, if he himself would live. So, after long uproar of voices striving to howl one another down, after numerous feints and dodges of unlaunched weapons, after all the empty menace of fierce animals somewhat too sagacious to commit suicide by destroying their own hunting pack, the avaricious antagonism subsided into sensible willingness to adjust differences. Threats died, weapons lowered, opponents stood quiet, listening to the counsel of some new leader who had risen above the mob. Presently all resumed their chopping.

Over the river, a tall white man awoke from a trance of concentrated watching and again glanced swiftly around. In the brilliant new sunlight the canoe was plainly visible to any eye which might chance to fix on it. Or, if the low lying shell itself was virtually invisible against the dull green shore, the upright whitish forms in it could be quickly distinguished from the background. Above and below it was no concealment; bushes were few and thin. After quick consideration he quietly said:

"We'd better get up the bank, partner. They're about through over there, and we're as conspicuous as a couple of undressed ladies at noon on Broadway. Hang on a minute longer while I tie up."

With which he pulled off his ragged shirt, lay back out of sight, tore strips, knotted them together, hitched one end of this improvised rope to a stick thwart; then, sliding overside, tied the other end to bush roots. This done, he crept along below the gunwale and grasped a hand of the blind man aft.

"This way," he directed. "Straight up. And make it snappy."

The short man acted at once. Quick as a monkey, he scrambled up the steep shore and was gone. Driscoll, more deliberate, reached inboard, gathered weapons, gazed again across the water; then arose and rapidly climbed. In another moment he, too, was hidden in the upper verdure.

On the beach the heavy but dull blades hacked away in renewed industry. As each head was finally torn away by hooked fingers, each hacker paused momentarily to straighten, breathe, suspiciously eye everything near and far. Then, temporarily reassured, each moved to another corpse and resumed his butchery. At length the grisly labor ended.

Down to the dead men's canoes the live ones plodded, to dump into them armfuls of heavy prizes. Weary, they took no time now to skin those weighty skulls; that work could come later. When all the severed heads were aboard, the victors carried wounded comrades who, though badly injured, might survive if taken home. These, handled none too gently by the men who must labor at the paddles, were dropped in the dugouts and left as they lay. Others, whose hurts precluded recovery, were left on the sands to die whenever they might.

Disregarding the wounded as if they had already expired, the conquerors took one final searching walk along the beach, making sure that nothing worth saving was overlooked. Then they shoved the boats offshore, sending three of them, empty, adrift. Manning the others, they swung out toward the center of the river.

They stroked fast. Now that their blood lust and greed were sated, they were smitten by that peculiar revulsion common to all Jiveros, which made them suddenly afraid of the corpses they had so hideously mutilated; the paradoxical fear that the malignant ghosts of those enemies, hovering near, might somehow poison them.

Too, the Jiveros now felt again the innate dread of living foes seeking their own lives in retribution. So, once under way, they paddled hard toward mid-river, there to use the full force of the current and to scan everything up and down and round about. There, more at ease, they could float down to their own concealed dugouts, transship and send these temporary ferries adrift, thus averting any possible pollution from vessels not wrought by their own hands.

They reached the current. They swung their prows downward. Then suddenly they halted their laden shells by a simultaneous backstroke. Some keen eye had detected the dugout snuggling against the far shore, held by strips of shirt; some voice had grunted rapid words. Now every face turned toward that lone, low boat.

For a half minute the brown shapes floated without motion. Then every bow swung toward the point of suspicion. And, paddling warily, peering keenly, the small but deadly flotilla glided farther and farther across the stream.

CHAPTER XII

BULLETS

BEHIND a tree at the top of the bank, Driscoll spoke briefly to Scar Face, who squatted close beside him.

"They've spotted us," he announced. "Think you can talk them off this time?"

"No. Ghosts don't work in daylight. It's up to you."

"Uh-huh. Well, if I don't see you again, so long."

Wherewith the bearded man recounted the upright shapes in the oncoming canoes, felt along his cartridge belt, glanced down at the bow and arrows he had brought ashore. He had exactly nineteen bullets. In the canoes were fourteen able bodied warriors.

Although he was a good shot, Driscoll knew he could not knock over every moving target with his slender supply. And the reviving glow of blood lust in the approaching visages proved that the survivors would fight to a finish. They sensed the weakness of that one deserted canoe; and, although they did not guess that its owners were white men, they now would no more turn back than would jaguars reverse in air after leaping at prey. Perhaps, though, a few arrows might wipe out the odds, if shot now. He was not much of an archer, but—

He stooped, grasping at the bow.

"Use your gun!" said Scar Face, apparently sensing his thought. "Shoot like hell! Yell like hell! And give me your knife!"

For a split second Driscoll eyed him. Then he stood again, leaving arrows untouched, pulling his gun. That knife could kill only one man—the sightless man, who preferred suicide to new captivity.

"Sorry," he refused. "I might need the knife."

With which he wheeled and began firing.

At the first and second shots he yelled. Thereafter he forgot vocal noises, although he understood their purpose—the old Jivero custom. Mouth fighting was not his habit. Moreover, the crashing reports of his gun, the shock of finding themselves facing a firearm, wrought far more havoc among the astounded savages than could his voice.

Instinctively they backed, momentarily chilled by fear. Meanwhile Scar Face, otherwise useless, fought with what he had. Hideously howling, he vociferated in rapidly differing tones. So doing, he groped for the arrows, but failed to find them.

The thunderous shots stopped. Driscoll ejected empty shells, reloaded. In two of the three canoes the bowman was dead or wounded. The other four bullets had missed.

In the momentary cessation of gunfire the unscathed savages realized that the deadly missiles came from only one weapon, and that the variant shouts were not backed by flying death. With harsh hisses they again drove their boats shoreward.

Then again cracked the measured explosions of the gun. The gunman now had braced himself solidly against his tree, rested his right hand in his left elbow, aimed with grim deliberation before firing. And now, in each canoe, the steersman lost control. One flopped forward; one slowly collapsed on the gunwale; the third dropped his paddle and, screeching, clutched a smashed shoulder. The dugouts slowed, floated downstream. Aboard them were mad scramblings, wild yells, frenzied commotion. But then, in the teeth of the intermittent gunfire and the clamor of Scar Face, they once more surged toward land.

Now they were near, very near. And once more the long gun barked, even more slowly. All the new steersmen fell, limp or writhing. The dugouts veered and listed crazily, almost overborne by weight of bodies dragging outboard. Yet, as these suddenly slain braves collapsed, others, still living, struggled up and fumbled for paddles or weapons. These were the wounded warriors who, loaded as freight, now had gathered all remaining energy to rise in desperate emergency.

Crippled, awkward, trying hard, but unable to act swiftly, they only increased the confusion of their quicker comrades. For a few seconds the six men still unhurt strove to regain control, shrieking furiously at the blundering, would-be helpers, knocking them down, stumbling over them and over corpses. Then, amid louder screams and resounding splashes, the staggering canoes capsized.

Two of them overturned by accident. The other upset when the able survivors, abandoning their bungling mates in despairing disgust, sprang overboard. For a moment or two the surface was a turmoil of desperate activity, hands thrashing water, faces gulping for air, bodies striving, sinking, vanishing forever into murky depths. Thereafter the frantic splashes subsided. Dead men had sunk at the first upsets; wounded men, fighting for life like drowning rats, had gone under in turn, dragging with them unwounded companions on whom they had fastened death grips. Now above water remained only three live heads, swimming fast for shore.

UPON that shore Driscoll snapped back into action. For the moment he had stood joyously watching what seemed complete annihilation of his foes. He was down to his last cartridge, the nineteenth, still in his belt. Now, viewing the hard, set faces which still came on, he shoved that lone bullet into his gun. Those visages, ferocious before, now were berserk. Everything lost behind them, the swimmers were implacably determined to get the gunman before them. And each of them brought in one fist his habitual weapon, a *chonta* spear.

At one head Driscoll took deliberate aim. At the crack of the last shot the head jerked, drooped forward. Holstering the gun, Driscoll snatched up bow and arrows. To the crouching blind man, who still was yelling, he barked—

"Shut up!"

The useless howls ceased. Striding forward into plain sight, the fighter loosed arrows at the swimmers. But, before the first missile left the string, the targets vanished, diving under. On the surface two lances, gripped in brown fists, slid on shoreward, while submerged bodies sped like dark fish, unseen. Gaging speed and distance, Driscoll shot fast. But, deflected by the water, every shaft missed its prey. As his final arrow splashed, the swimmers reached shore.

They arrived together, but somewhat downstream. Up from the water erupted brawny shapes, gasping, glaring around, momentarily confused. While they sought the canoe, Driscoll dropped his bow, drew his knife, snapped it open, took a half step forward. Then he jerked back, eyes darting to Scar Face. Two long lances against one short knife . . .

The knife came up. On its blade his teeth clenched. His hands grabbed the blind man.

"Down the bank!" he mumbled. "Hell bent!"

Hell bent they went. Into the dugout they tumbled. Scar Face, thrown on his stomach by powerful guiding hands, lay gasping on the bottom. Driscoll, snatching his knife from between his jaws, started for the shirt strip rope; then, grinning, he leaped back ashore.

Up the edge of that shore was sprinting the nearer of the Jiveros, spear upraised. Feet slipping, body swaying, balance perilous, he managed somehow to keep coming fast; and he had almost reached the canoe. Behind him, at some distance, ran the other.

As the white man unexpectedly dashed to meet him the leader halted and thrust. But his bare heels slipped again; his hurried lunge went high. It went still higher as his assailant's left arm knocked the lance upward. An instant later a steel blade stabbed into his abdomen. Screeching, he collapsed.

Whirling, Driscoll bounded back aboard. With him he carried the lance. One sweep of the reddened blade and the mooring line was cut. One shove of the spear against the shore and the boat was drifting outward. Then, with the long weapon ready for further action, Driscoll turned to face the last Jivero.

He had halted. He stood staring. The sight of his fellow writhing, disemboweled, disarmed by the white man who had dashed in and out, struck him motionless. While he hesitated, Driscoll muttered:

"Up and at it, buddy! Paddle if you can!"

Scar Face could, and did. Somehow he found a paddle. The dugout veered farther out, blindly steered, yet expertly propelled. Then the brown statue behind it came alive again.

Yelling, he hurled his spear at the retreating whites, then dived in final pursuit. The missile rattled across the gunwales, missing Scar Face by inches. Driscoll, growling an oath, watched the water astern.

Scar Face now was stroking powerfully, and the boat was gaining speed at every sweep of his blade. Yet, within a minute, wet fists shot up alongside, gripped the gunwale and pulled downward. The craft tilted, almost upset by the sudden clutch. But Driscoll, stepping up on the far edge, counterbalanced the dipping shell. And his captured lance stabbed at a brownish back just under the surface.

A face jerked upward, weirdly contorted; gasped, gurgled, sank, glaring unquenchable hatred as it went under. Fists went lax and fell away. The dark body faded beneath the water. The canoe floated free. And Driscoll, now standing squarely amidships, threw a final glance all around and then laughed like a loon.

On the river now swam no other living thing. Downstream floated capsized dugouts and a litter of smaller wreckage—wooden weapons, hammock rolls, scattered foodstuffs. All else had gone under; all except a wicker basket, partially submerged, which happened to catch Driscoll's roving eyes and put a crazy edge on his shouted mirth. It was the basket he had coveted last night; the basket of dried, shrunken, empty heads, still buoyant.

Grabbing his paddle, he stroked toward it. At every stroke he laughed more loudly, while Scar Face, behind, scowled with deepening concern. Fighting ended, Driscoll seemed to have gone daft. Perhaps, for the time, he really was somewhat unbalanced. He had not slept for a long time and had gone through much. Now everything was a howling joke. He, the lost cripple, and Scar Face, the lost blind man, and the funny little heads of dead men were still afloat and going somewhere, while two hordes of solid savages were sunk in bloody oblivion. It was all a hell of a crazy world, and this was the craziest part of it.

Still chuckling, the bow paddler lifted from the water the long tray and set it inboard; contemplated the impish little visages, and chortled anew. As he resumed work, he broke into a hoarse song which fully convinced the blind listener that his mind had slipped: a slight variant of a ditty once well known to a death defiant American army in Europe:

"Two thousand dollars going to the folks,
Two thousand dollars going to the folks—"

CHAPTER XIII

UNDERSTANDING

ANOTHER morning. Bright sun blazed on an empty river and a bare beach. Fresh breezes ruffled jungle foliage with a soft sough. Voices of birds and beasts spoke in random dissonance. Nowhere in the open was any sign of men. Yet men were there.

Craftily concealed among snags above a stone shored point, a low canoe lay in wait. Hidden among brush behind a huge *aceite palo* tree on that point, two men sat up in hammocks, stretched, arose, moved about with the languor left by long sleep. The tall one walked outward to a sugarloaf rock and surveyed the vacant stream; then glanced at the beach. His nose wrinkled, and he turned away.

On those pale sands, now darkened only by scattered splotches of dried brownish red, he had labored yesterday at a job which he now preferred to forget: spearing a couple of wounded men, who otherwise would have expired in slow misery, and then dragging to the water many corpses, most of which were gruesome. In this funereal work, insisted upon by Scar Face, the blind man had aided indefatigably. Otherwise it would not have been finished by Driscoll, to whose tired muscles and offended senses it became exceedingly repugnant. At its end he had slung the hammocks behind the oilwood and forthwith dropped into coma, utterly worn out. All afternoon and all night he had slept. And now, although invigorated, again he found his empty stomach still somewhat squeamish at sight of those suggestive stains. Striding back to his partner, he busied himself with breakfast.

They ate in silence. At length, full fed, Driscoll stretched his long arms again and chuckled as he said:

"Now who wants a fight? Bring on another hundred headhunters, ghost, and watch me work 'em over into peaceable citizens."

The twisted face opposite him grinned.

"I haven't any more tough eggs in stock," said Scar Face. "You'll have to shop around."

"Well, all right. Any time you're ready to drift, I'll start looking."

"All right," echoed the other. "It won't be long now. But first—"

The blind man moved to the huge tree. Amid small bushes at its base he felt along the ground; then halted.

"Dig in here," he directed.

Driscoll, towering over him, peered down. His partner's hand rested on a small jagged stone, upright in the earth. That earth was somewhat sunken, as if once dug up, replaced, beaten since by many rains. The brush obscuring it—brush perhaps planted by human hands—was not old. Into the searching eyes came a sudden gleam. Powerful fists closed on the brush, tugged, ripped it up easily. The roots were shallow. As they tore loose, they revealed a layer of small rocks, all at the same depth.

Dropping to his knees, Driscoll pulled those rocks loose and tossed them aside. The blind man now helped, finding stones by touch, yanking them upward with eager strength. Below remained more earth.

"About a foot more," panted Scar Face, "and we may find something."

"What?"

No answer. Dirt flew fast, loosened by Driscoll's knife, clawed up and flung aside by four burrowing hands. Then the delving fingers struck hard objects which were not stones. One by one those solid things were unearthed, set aside. After awhile the blind digger panted—

"That's—all."

Settling back on his haunches, he wiped sweat off his scarred face with a dirty hand which left long smears. Automatically Driscoll did likewise.

On the upthrown soil rested a long thing wrapped in a rubber blanket; two huge bottles tightly stoppered; and a little oblong box. That, as Scar Face had said, was all. But it was plenty.

The long object was unmistakably a rifle. Both bottles had at some time held rice, grains of which still remained at the bottom. Now, one was almost full of cartridges. The other was crammed to the cork with raw gold.

The little light box—Driscoll forgot that. Mopping his face once more, he stared anew, fumbled for words, finally found them.

"How come?" he demanded.

Scar Face chuckled. Then he grew grave. His hand rested now on the box. Face downward, he seemed to look at that insignificant rectangle. His fingers tapped it in an absent drumming. Then, bracing up, he said—

"This was Yeaton's."

Driscoll, eyeing him, waited.

"Yeaton's. Yeaton was my partner. We came down here together on a trip of exploration. He was a commercial explorer, experienced, practical, working at the time for a company interested in developing gold dredging here in a big way. He'd been everywhere, fought everything. And now he lies over yonder, killed by mosquitos!"

THIS head moved toward the sugarloaf rock—a natural tombstone — beside which Driscoll had noticed no grave, but which might easily shelter a dozen buried men.

"Mosquitos?" ejaculated the listener. "Oh, you mean fever?"

"Exactly. Jungle fever. He'd had it before, but this was once too often. So there he is. And this is his rifle; these are his cartridges; and in this box are notebooks and other papers I took from his clothes." A hand touched each designated article. "The gun's a .405. The rest of us carried other calibers. None of us wanted excess baggage. So we cached all these things here until we might come back."

He paused. On his wry lips grew a distorted smile.

"And I, the blind wreck," he added, "am the only one to come back!"

Head back, he laughed mirthlessly. Driscoll, eyes on the unmentioned carboy of gold, broke in—

"You're leaving out a lot, fellow."

Scar Face sobered.

"Yes. Well, going back: Yeaton and I teamed up at Iquitos with some gold hunters coming this way—an Irishman, a Russian and four Peruvians. They planned to travel up to the Santiago headwaters and work down. But after we reached this river, they changed their minds and worked up, washing sands and prospecting creek mouths. Yeaton and I worked with them; gold hunting was his job, and I had nothing better to do. And I, by fool luck, happened to strike two big pockets. Most of the stuff in that bottle came out of those two holes of mine.

"So we reached here. Yeaton died. The rest of us moved on. But there was trouble. The Peruvians wanted to desert us and sneak back for this gold. We watched them, and beat them up now and then. But they got us all in the end, the yellow devils!

"McGuire, the Irishman, stepped on a snake that mysteriously got under his hammock in the night. Nikolski, the Russian, died of acute indigestion. His stomach was bad, anyway. So both of those deaths looked natural enough; just tough luck. But Nikolski thought otherwise. Before he was too far gone he shot two of the Peruvians; tried to get the others, but they dodged into cover. After he died, they almost convinced me that they were innocent. They were glib talkers, and there was no proof against them. So I gave them the benefit of the doubt. I needed them, anyway, as paddlers. And the three of us went on in one canoe, all working. I sat astern, steering, watching.

"But they got away from me. A man must sleep. I woke up one morning all alone. The canoe was gone, and so were those two yellow sneaks. So then, like you, I wandered around, hit a path and followed it. I still had my rifle and plenty of fool courage. And then the trap hit me."

His slashed countenance contracted, as if once more he felt that terrific stroke and the misery of later years. Then he tersely concluded:

"And that's about all. Something got those sneaks. The stuff's still here. And it's all yours if you want it. I have what I want."

Driscoll stared. His gaze dwelt on the narrator; veered to the small box, then to the bottled gold. For a moment, as he contemplated the yellow dust and nuggets inside the dirty glass, his eyes glowed. But then they cooled, narrowed shrewdly. Reaching, he seized the box and opened it.

As Scar Face had said, the contents comprised only papers and small personal belongings. Brow wrinkled, he again peered at the blind man.

"You don't mean that," he contradicted. "There's a man sized fortune in this bottle, and—"

"And to hell with it!" snapped the other, suddenly choleric. "I tell you I have what I want! I want life—liberty —the sound of white men's voices—and certainty that my mind's still sound! I know now that I am sane. If I hadn't found this place and these things—or proof that they'd been here—I'd have let go all holds. I've been living so long in this madhouse, I've fought so hard to keep rational— Hell, Driscoll, you don't know what I mean! Gold, guns—what are they? Lifeless things that keep you alive, that's all. Take the whole layout, use it, shove me into a blind men's home up North and forget me! That's all I want! Life, sanity, sanitation—no more bloody stinks, no more hellish howling all night, no more—"

The disjointed sentences stopped. The contorted face froze, teeth set. The short body leaped up, quivering, fighting for control.

Driscoll shot upward in turn; clenched strong hands on the writhing shoulders and held them hard.

"Snap out of that!" he commanded. "It's all gone by. Forget it!"

The twitching muscles stiffened. The powerful grip relaxed. Turning away, Driscoll unwrapped the rifle.

Heavily oiled, thickly rolled in rubber, it had not been impaired by its long burial. Neither had the tightly corked cartridges. Slipping a load into the magazine, Driscoll aimed at random across the river and fired the string. Every shell crashed instantly under the firing pin, and the solid kicks of recoil made the shooter grin as he lowered the piece.

"Man, this is a gun!" He chuckled. "And what'll happen to anything that gets in front of us now will be just too bad, let me tell the world."

Scar Face, now standing quiet, abruptly stepped forward, hand outstretched.

"Let me do that!" he requested.

DRISCOLL reloaded, passed the weapon, watched. Five more shots hammered out, aimless, useless, wasted. But the handling of the gun, the poise of the gunner, the surety of action, betrayed much experience in rifle work. As he handed back the emptied arm, he smiled and rubbed his shoulder.

"Thanks," he said. "A gun does feel good. Well, let's go!"

"Not just yet," demurred the tall man. "You haven't yet told me who you are. And until you do, you'll stay right here. Now come through!"

The scarred face tightened. Then, as if ashamed, the bald man confessed:

"Well, my name's Bruce — James Baldwin Bruce. I came down here to— oh, just to find a new experience. And I certainly got it! The last real one I'll ever have. From now on I'll be just an ugly old blind man, sucking a pipe in a dark corner and thinking. But even that's worth living for, until it gets melancholy. Then—"

He shrugged and turned away. Driscoll frowned thoughtfully, groping for something in his own mind, gradually finding dim recollections, fitting them together. That name had stirred up random memories. He had heard it or seen it before; seen also a published picture of a hairless, hard, set face . . .

The scattered bits became a coherent mosaic. James Baldwin Bruce, known on far, wild trails as Baldy Bruce, fearless adventurer who sought the most dangerous parts of earth and, somehow, always came out of them alive. Doctor James Baldwin Bruce, explorer, who, unlike some others, abhorred publicity, yet, by writing an amazing book concerning a certain obscure African tribe, had brought on himself undesired notoriety.

Originally a prosaic, small town doctor, he had gone overseas with the A. E. F. While he worked on wounded doughboys, his home was wiped out by fire. His wife and two children all were burned. War ended, he could not return to the ashes of his former life. Instead, he roved wherever he scented some "new experience", as he said. And, since his mind was essentially that of a doctor, created and trained to study human bodies and brains, this search had led him to whatever places and peoples seemed most worth studying; namely, the most primitive, most savage, least known. Thus he passed a dozen years, intrepidly penetrating the blankest spaces on world maps, caring little if he should perish, yet always emerging to seek something else. And thus he had been comparatively happy, rambling in obscurity, until suddenly he found himself yanked up into glaring light for exhibition by the publisher.

That exhibition had not lasted long. Suddenly he had vanished. Since then no trace of him had been found. But to Driscoll, now contemplating him, the reason for that disappearance was clear, and much else besides. Sickened by commercialized civilization, lured by the virtually unknown Rio Santiago and its weird head shrinkers, he had bolted with Yeaton. And Yeaton, though he must have been a regular fellow (else Bruce would not have teamed with him), must also have been the less experienced of the two. Bruce, last survivor of that expedition, tough veteran of many another, must have been its real brains.

With a thin grin, Driscoll suspected that those last two Peruvians had not slipped away from the sleeper quite as easily as Scar Face had said; that before they got out of sight they had stopped a bullet or two at long range.

But that was conjectural. Indisputable was the fact that Baldy Bruce was through adventuring. He had taken the paths of peril once too often, and all he had left was life, courage, memories.

Driscoll's eyes narrowed. For another moment he stood thinking. Then he stepped toward Scar Face, who now was leaning somberly against the tree.

"Listen, fellow," he said evenly. "You're partly wrong. You've got a lot to live for. When you're tired of sucking that pipe in the corner, you can start out again on your old trails, and let other people in on them. You can write—"

Scar Face recoiled as if unexpectedly struck.

"Write?" he snapped. "Write? That's the last thing I'd—"

"Cool off. I know why you feel that way. I've heard of you. Write about a lot of other things you've seen; things that a lot of men, real men, want to know. You're a gold mine of information. If you keep it all to yourself, you're just a hog. Put it in print, buddy! Then it'll live when you're gone."

Bruce grunted disparagingly.

"There's a lot of people that want to read more about Baldy Bruce," insisted Driscoll. "And if you can't write without eyes, you can dictate. And you can lecture, too. And if you're fussy about your looks— Hell, fellow, you've been an Army doctor, and you know what a plastic surgeon can do to your mug. By the time a good one gets through with you, you'll look better than you ever did. It'll cost something, but you've got the price. This gold is all yours. If you think I'll take an ounce of it, you're cuckoo. All I want is this gun and something new to shoot it at. Now swallow that, and we'll be going."

Bruce made no answer. But his back straightened.

"And," Driscoll added, "salt this down too. I'm taking you out of here because I think you're still good. Otherwise I'd sink you right here, along with the other dead ones. And if you let me down, I'll sink you yet. I'll just say to the boys on the out trails, 'Baldy Bruce? Sure, I knew him. I pulled him out of hell so that he'd tell us what he knew. But he'd lost his guts, and when I got him back home he didn't make good. He just sat and sucked a pipe and finally passed out, a busted old bum.' "

"You will like hell!" snapped Bruce. "I hope not."

With that, grinning wide, Driscoll again turned away. And quickly he loaded the canoe. Into it he put rifle, cartridges, gold, Yeaton's papers, Jivero hammocks and food. Last of all, he bore to the waterside the long wickerwork tray of shrunken human heads.

For a moment he stood looking down at it. Two nights ago it had been a coveted prize, an incentive to desperate adventure, worth two thousand dollars. Today it was a ghastly mess, whence arose a faint stench. With a contemptuous sniff, Driscoll flung it afar.

It splashed, slowly subsided, drifting away. He strode back to Bruce.

"All set," he declared. "Now are you going somewhere, or not?"

"I guess I am, Jeff. Show me the way home, and I'll try to make good with the old gang that wants to know things."

"Now you're talking!"

Hands met. Side by side the pair walked to the waiting dugout. A moment later they were afloat. Stroking strongly, they rounded the point and, without a backward look, headed for the mighty Rio Amazon. And, as they went, the blind face aft still smiled, visioning new travels on old trails and mental reunion with old comrades.

Behind, the sugarloaf rock and the oilwood tree receded. The bloodstained beach faded. An oblong tray of little empty faces drifted, lifelessly smirking up at a hard sky, aside at the murderous jungle, down at drowning depths wherein dully dragged their own slayers, now food for fish. Gradually that basket sank lower and lower, drawn into oblivion. At last it was gone. And from all that scene the white invaders also were gone; gone away downstream, speeding toward their own white world.

THE END

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

A LETTER concerning distress signals used by the Allies in the World War:

Spokane, Wisconsin

In Commander Ellsberg's story, "War Zone" (Feb. 1st), he refers to an SOS being sent out by the torpedoed *Galway*. During the World War the SOS was obsolete. Every radio operator aboard any Ally vessel was in possession of a series of distress calls which by their very letter signified their vessel's plight. The distress signal for a torpedoed vessel or vessel attacked by a U-boat was ALLO repeated with position in the same manner as an SOS. BXZ was the call for aid from any British man-o'-war. ALLX from any Ally man-o'-war. The reason for this was simple: The first part of the war the U-boats baited many an Ally vessel into a torpedo trap by sending out an SOS. The vessel would respond to the distress signal and receive a torpedo. An order was passed whereby only Ally men-o'-war answered distress signals. The Germans still used the signal for bait by having a flock of destroyers rush on some fake call to leave the sea lanes clear for their work.

WITH the entrance of the United States into the war and the placing of Navy operators aboard all U. S. vessels, the secret distress signals went into effect. Operators were instructed in their use, and credit must be given that the radiomen sure kept the secret, as the Germans never did seem to get wise to their use. At the close of the war they were still trying to bait Ally vessels with fake SOS calls. That the Germans based the reason for their failure on the assumption that Ally operators had become ear-wise to radio signals enough to tell a telephonican spark from the quince gap sparks of the Ally, is evident by the fact that they attempted to use this type gap in their set for the purpose.

If Commander Ellsberg cares to verify this, let him get hold of some old Navy operator that served in the war zone and he will learn that there was more than one trick of sending out a distress signal during the war. —JAY J. KALEZ

Here is Commander Ellsberg's reply:

Westfield, New Jersey

I'm sorry I can't agree with Mr. Kalez that any error was made in this case. The sentence he referred to is probably this in "War Zone," page 21:

"How his heart had leaped when first he sighted that foaming bow rushing up over the rim of the sea in answer to an SOS from the sinking *Galway*."

Now it was a matter of general knowledge in the Service during the war that distress signals should be sent in code to avoid possible submarine traps, as Mr. Kalez says, but what of it in this instance? The reference is to a distress signal, which SOS immediately evokes in the mind of every reader; if I had said ALLO or ALLX, the whole thread of that paragraph would have been balled up while I explained to the reader what it meant and why it was used instead of SOS, and in the case in point, there was no call in the connection used to go into the technical intricacies of how the distress signal was made; it made no difference to *Biff Wolters* swimming in the sea.

Now as to my authority for using SOS this way, and to show it wasn't obsolete during the war, let me quote Admiral Sims, our C. in C. abroad, and Rear Admiral Gordon Campbell, R.N., skipper of a British mystery ship, something like the *Galway*. First, Admiral Sims, "The Victory at Sea," page 148.

"8:50 A.M. SOS. *J. L. Luckenback* being gunned by submarine. Position 48.08 N. 9.31 W.

9:25 *Conyngham* to *Nicholson*. Proceed to assistance of SOS ship.

9:30 *Luckenback* to U. S. A.: Am maneuvering around."

And then more verbatim quotations from the logs of the destroyers. From the above, it will be obvious that at least to Admiral Sims and the shippers of both *Conyngham* and *Nicholson*, the use of SOS to refer to a distress signal from an American ship being sunk by a U-boat, was not obsolete in the late war.

Second, Rear Admiral Gordon Campbell, R.N., then captain of a British mystery ship, as related by himself in "My Mystery Ships." He gives a copy of one of the S.S. *Farnborough's* daily ship's newspapers, to keep his crew informed on what was happening. See page 118.

"Press Bureau, 6 P.M. S.S. *Farnborough*.

"At 5:30 this morning an SOS was received from an unknown ship about 100 miles away. At 7:30 H.M. sloop—picked up 25 survivors from S.S. ———— which etc."

Again on page 151 of same:

"We didn't have long to wait before realizing that the activity was in earnest again. The usual SOS signals were received."

Again when his own mystery ship, the Q-5, alias S.S. *Loderer*, alias S.S. *Farnborough*, was under fire from U-83, already torpedoed, but playing 'possum waiting for U-83 to break surface, note the following on page 188:

"The wireless operator, locked up in his cabin by himself, had to sit still and do nothing; he must have been aching to send out an SOS and have his picture in the illustrated papers next day as 'the man who sent out the SOS,' but he knew," etc.

Now Admiral Sims and Rear Admiral Campbell talked about SOS signals during the war when they were writing for the average reader for the same reason I did; they wanted to be understood. And I believe that neither in the British Navy nor in ours, even when naval men were talking to each other about distress signals, or logging them, did they use anything but SOS, which was a long way from being obsolete; if it was, then I'll be obsolete too, along with Sims and Campbell and practically every skipper who had to report a distress signal.

—EDWARD ELLSBERG

* * *

AND a letter that indirectly bears on the above correspondence—the moot question of accuracy in writers:

Vancouver, British Columbia

I've often wondered about the urge of some readers to quarrel about the use of more or less well established terms, even if they do not happen to be an exact fit. There is a whole raft of them that have, or are about to become accepted as parts of the language; and after all, an uncontrolled passion for accuracy is often a nuisance, if not a curse. Maybe I say this because I can never remember myself to say "cupro-nickel" bullets when I have an occasion to refer to them; still, I think that "steel-jackets" is a whole lot more pithy and expressive, even if misleading. Nearly everybody who is really interested in the subject knows what is meant, and those who are not do not care if they are made of cheese. I know a considerable number of people, some of them experts whom you could wake up in the middle of the night and ask them, and they would tell you before they got their eyes ungummed the amount of copper and nickel, antimony and lead used in a certain specified cartridge of several more common types, including the amount, kind and form of powder used in loading them, and all sorts of other data, yet in conversation they apparently know of only two classes of bullets: "soft" or "lead", and the "steel-jackets".

But I guess I am an obscurantist and like to keep the uninitiated in ignorance. I think however that there is an economy in language as in most things else, which fights shy of cumbersome and shoppy looking words outside of more or less technical discussion and leads naturally towards choice and preference for simpler and easier, descriptive rather than explanatory terms.

—J. J. EDWARDS

* * *

RAYMOND S. SPEARS, of our Writers' Brigade, offers a clue to the mystery of the burro, though he doesn't answer the question where they go when they die in the desert:

Inglewood, California

Powder River Jack Lee drops in to see me once in a while, and he tells me that of about 9,000,000 wild horses and jacks (burros), 5,000,000 have been driven in to be butchered and canned these recent years. The meat is used in dog-biscuits, fur-farm feeding, and the meat has a European market—for human consumption. Burro is especially good in roasts, and is often served "unbeknownst" in desert regions above and below the Border. A burro is good venison.

—RAYMOND S. SPEARS

* * *

ALTHOUGH his introduction (as per custom) does not accompany his first, but rather his third, story in our pages, this note from Francis Beverly Kelley about himself and his circus experiences is not the less welcome:

Delaware, Ohio

When I was four years old, my father took me to a circus. Perhaps it was a mistake. At any rate, from that moment I became so interested in circusdom in general and wild animals in particular that eighteen years later, upon graduation from college, I decided to follow the trail of the red wagons for awhile instead of treading the prescribed paths to success which every collegian is supposed to follow—sheepskin in one hand; unbounded optimism in the other.

Among other things, I was anxious to find out for myself if the regal looking lion really had a good claim to the mythical crown of the animal kingdom. I spent some time with the John Robinson Circus and there got my first real look at wild animal training and the drama that goes on behind the scenes. I met Mabel Stark, the only woman in the world who breaks, trains and works tigers. Her exciting career has fed newspaper and magazine columns for a decade, and no circus woman except the late Lillian Leitzel achieved greater prominence in the world of red wagons and white canvas. When I joined this circus, she had just returned from a six-week stay in a hospital—the result of a battle with murder-bent Bengal tigers that almost rang down the curtain for the intrepid queen of the steel arenas. Two weeks later she was putting her big cats through their paces as though nothing had happened.

The latest sensation in wild animal training is youthful Clyde Beatty, who hails from a little town near Chillicothe, Ohio, and who works a mixed group of about three dozen lions and tigers with thrills piled higher than a reformer's hat. He was the talk of New York City during the Madison Square Garden engagement of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus a year ago.

FROM my initial circus trouping I went to work for the Indianapolis *Times*, never missing an opportunity to visit the winter quarters of the American Circus Corporation at Peru, Indiana. Became a press agent for the Clarence Darrow debates. One day I had an interview with George Meighan, chief-of-staff for John Ringling, and as a result I joined the Ringling-Barnum organization, handling radio talks, lectures to schools and clubs wherever the circus exhibited. This is my present occupation during seven months of the year—the usual length of the circus season on the road.

You can not adopt the rôle of circus trouper without becoming interested in nearly all aspects of this nomadic community of tents; yet my first interest remains principally my last—the big cats. In present-day circuses, they are treated humanely and trained patiently. They add an unmistakable flavor of adventure and hazard to the performance because, like an erratic athletic team, they usually can be counted upon to do the unexpected. In the fascinating school of the steel arena they parallel a classroom where both intelligent pupils and those of retarded mental growth are found. There are model students and there are morons in the big training cages. There are roaring "pupils" which, like barking dogs, seldom make good their threats, and there are stubborn, ill-tempered jungle denizens that sulk in silence and await an opportunity to attack.

The public makes its greatest mistake in assuming that all circus people are rough and uncultured simply because they must submit to the hardships and danger of outdoor trouping. The opposite is true in many cases. Circusdom recruits its population from five continents. Among the personnel of the world's largest circus (Ringling-Barnum carries more than 1600 people on tour) there are university graduates, performers descended from royalty and cultured men and women from many lands as well as men in various labor departments who, though less tutored in actual schooling, often can produce a valuable diploma from the University of Hard Knocks and Bruises. With its citizenry of many nationalities and numerous religions, the circus is a great place to learn tolerance. All of which probably can be summed up like this: "Never turn up your nose at anyone; remember the law of gravity."

—FRANCIS BEVERLY KELLEY

* * *

ERNEST W. SHAW, of Ask Adventure, adds to our store of interesting mountain-lion anecdotes:

South Carver, Massachusetts

The articles appearing in the late issues of *Adventure* have caused me to wonder if you would care to continue the subject sufficiently to print this offering supporting the fact that lions do scream. Perhaps not often, and again perhaps not at all in some sections of the country, yet I can testify that they do and have done so at widely separated areas, such as southwestern Colorado and southern Montana.

For several years I was raising cattle together with a small bunch of range mares on my ranch in northern Archuletta County, Colorado. In the summer time there were plenty of neighbors, but in the winter many or all of us would move out, wintering our stock on the lower winter ranges far south from the mountains where there was little snow. The first time I attempted to winter my cattle in the valley I was the only one doing so, and my nearest neighbor was some 6 or 7 miles distant over a high ridge in the next valley to the east. I started feeding just before Thanksgiving and fed until the first week in May. The snow about 4 feet deep on the level during February and March. The only open trails were those made by my sled between the stable and the hay corrals and the feed lot and by the stock going to water at the nearby creek.

One moonlit night in January during the coldest part of the winter, I was reading in the little one-room cabin when I first heard a sound that was instantly recognized as the same I had heard and read described as the scream of a lion. The next morning right after breakfast and even before feeding, I slipped on my webs and snowshoed out across the park or flat sloping gradually toward the timber at the base of some high mountains. It was more than half a mile across the park to the nearest timber. As the sound indicated, I found the lion trail about midway of the opening. He had come down from the east rimrock and gone in almost a straight line across the park to the west. At two separate places his measured stride had broken and the snow plainly told where he'd stopped and turned facing my buildings and corrals. I presumed, and still do, that he had howled when at those points. At one he had sat down on his haunches. Any old lion hunter will know that I am not mistaken as to its being a lion that made the tracks and not a big footed lynx when I tell you that at frequent intervals along the track could be seen the tell-tale marks in the snow left by the downward loop of his tail—a mark never left by the short tailed lynx, even when snow conditions cause the two tracks to be otherwise very similar. An old-timer is never fooled on either track.

WELL, you will say, you heard something but you did not see the thing that made the noise. Very well, how is this one? The very next spring I had some 12 or 14 mares which dropped foals. I was riding every day, in the south pasture where I had placed these heavy mares. I had a few cowbells on some of the mares against lion attack. Did not have enough to go round. After lion had killed the first colt, I rode 20 miles to the nearest sheep camp and got me some buck bells and strapped them on some of the smaller colts. I lost one colt with a bell on, but believe the bells helped. However, one morning on my ride, I saw a mare without her colt and I hunted until I found him in the edge of the timber where the lion had made his kill. From the tracks I could pretty well visualize what had happened. The mare had not prevented the kill, but by repeated charging and whirling and licking as she whirled, she had driven the lion away before he had much more than sucked some blood from the throat.

That night I took my blankets and rifle and lay out all night down wind from the carcass. I was at the base of a bushy cedar about 35 yards out in the open from the edge of timber where the colt lay. Nothing happened until just about daylight next morning, when I was startled out of a doze by the long drawn-out scream of a lion. He was coming back to his kill and was warning all other night prowlers away from it. I could not see him and, after waiting some time without his showing up and as it was beginning to get lighter in the east, I crawled over and into the edge of the woods. About 50 yards in and up the slope was a low rimrock. Reaching a point where I could see it in several places along the rim, I waited. At last I saw him slip down the hill and take stand on the very edge of the rim, his feet bunched just as though about to spring. His neck was outstretched and his eyes fastened on the point where the dead colt lay. He opened his mouth and I saw and heard him give, or shall I say repeat, the same scream I had heard before on more than one occasion. I shot him as soon as he had quit. That is the first one I *saw* scream.

Later, in Montana, I saw and heard another scream. That one was a she-lion accompanied by two half-grown cubs. It was in the elk country, and she was out for her evening hunt. Several young bull elk were bugling near at hand in the timber. It was just about sundown on a soft evening two days before our first heavy fall snowstorm. I was riding at the time a very fine rope horse. He was fast and weighed right at 1300 and was built like a watch. I had once heard Buffalo Jones tell how a mounted man could easily tree a lion and although I could have shot the old one and perhaps one of the cubs, I decided that I'd try out Jones' stunt and tree the three of them. It's too long a story to give here, but it's enough to say that they did not tree and I saw and heard that old she scream, not once but several times during the next few minutes.

—ERNEST W. SHAW

ON USING buckshot for bear or deer:

Covington, Louisiana

In the Dec. 1st issue Mr. John B. Abbott of Beachwood, N. J., asks about buckshot loaded with tallow for bear or deer.

On two occasions I have killed a deer in the marshes of southern Louisiana while hunting snipe and using 1 oz. of No. 10 shot. I did it by "rounding" the shell (cutting about half through the wall) just above the powder wad. Not from choice, but because I had no other load. Mr. A. will find that he can put a hole through a 1 inch board at sixty feet.

However, this was in the days of black powder and in a snipe gun (cylinder bored in the right barrel).

—F. A. FRERE

FURTHER notes on old-time men-of-war:

Wollaston, Massachusetts

I should like to speak of Mr. Sidney Marks' letter in the Camp-fire, February 15th number.

In speaking of these ships of the line, date is important. Mr. Marks speaks of four-deckers as being rare, yet I believe there were a number built very late in the sailing ship era. We had one—I think, the *Pennsylvania*—at least the well known Martin painting indicates this, if I am not in error. I haven't his picture before me, so I must speak from memory. The British had a few also; most of them were converted to steamers.

In regard to "four pretty complete tiers of guns", I was speaking of 1812 and after, when the gangways of some English three-deckers were armed. They showed, it is true, a break in the waist, but this was not obvious from a distance, when the hammocks were stowed in the nettings. The Americans were the first to arm the gangways in the frigate class; I think they were the first to turn out frigates with an unbroken sheer line. I have the draughts of *Philadelphia* and *New York*, both built 1799, which show an unbroken waist, though the *New York* had no bulwarks on her forecastle.

Mr. Marks is correct, however, when speaking of the earlier three-deckers, of the *Victory* class. There were a number of flush three-deckers built, however, as the *Ohio* class of the U. S. N. and the *Cæsar* class in the R. N. are examples. In 1820, or a little earlier, the *Victory* was armed, so that she had "four pretty complete tiers of guns".

THE plans of the *Santissima Trinidad* are in the files of the Bureau of Construction and Repair, U. S. Navy Department, Washington, D. C. I saw them, last fall. I am not particularly interested in ships-of-the-line, or I would have traced the plan. The only plan of a four-decker that I have is of the British *St. Lawrence*, laid down on Lake Ontario in 1815, but not completed. If Mr. Marks will get in touch with me, I think I can help him procure plans or dimensions of some of the ships that interest him. It seems to me that his 1802-16 74-gun ships were Peake's "Forty Thieves"; perhaps Fansham's "History of Naval Architecture" will give their dimensions. The British have very complete records.

The large ships-of-the-line, such as our *Pennsylvania*, appear to have been mere floating forts. None of them could sail; the crack 74 in the U. S. N. was the *Ohio*, built at New York by Eckford. The American Navy had no 74-gun ships until after 1815.

The British, however, had some very fine three-deckers from 1830 to 1850. Those designed by Symonds were quite fast.

THE best naval vessels seem to have been frigates, ship-sloops and the brigs. Of these classes, I happen to have about 200 plans, running back to 1742.

The ships-of-the-line were expensive craft to run. I think Mr. Marks underestimates the required crew for the *Trinidad*, as her crew should be about 1200 men, though she may have had fewer during her famous battle. She was much lighter armed than our *Pennsylvania*, for example. The first American three-decker was really two and a half (broken waist), and was built at Portsmouth, N. H, as the *America;* she was handed over to France as a diplomatic gift about 1783.

Most laymen, I take it, believe all sailing vessels of before the time of the clipper ships to have been slow-sailing slugs. This is not the case, however, as the plans of 1742 show sharp vessels were common, and contrary to general ideas, the British built some extraordinarily fast sailing men-o'-war, as did the Americans.

—H. I. CHAPELLE

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Horse

PONIES. Spurs. Teeth. Halters.

Request:—"1. Is the Hackney used extensively in the United States? If so, where and for what purpose?

2. What is your opinion of the use of spurs, especially the so-called Mexican spurs?

3. Would you tell me the approximate age of a horse whose cups can be seen plainly only in the outside pair of incisors in the lower jaw?

4. Last, but not least, what can be done to prevent halter pulling?"

—F. HERBERT STEVENSON, Champaign, Illinois

Reply, by Mr. Thomas H. Dameron:—1. Hackney ponies and Hackneys are not used extensively in this country. They are seldom seen outside of horse shows.

2. I consider that spurs are as essential as any other part of the riding equipment. However, no one except an experienced rider should be allowed to use them. They offer means of abuse which ruins many good horses.

3. It is hard to tell the exact age by your description, since at eight years the corner cup is shallow and rounded. It may disappear any time from the ninth to the eleventh year, but during these years it changes from elliptical to small and round, and the central becomes triangular. After nine years one can estimate the age by the length of the cement groove, the angle of incidence (angle at which front teeth meet), the length of the crown, and the triangularity of the laterals.

4. Run a loose rope through the halter ring between the front legs and loop it up around the body just in front of the hips. When the horse pulls back the rope will tighten around his flanks. About two or three pulls and he is generally through.

This method is sometimes used to lead a horse, with the rope looped over just behind the shoulders. This sometimes sores the backbone, however, which may be prominent just behind the withers.

Buenos Aires

ACCUSTOMED to European dainties, this sophisticated city probably wouldn't care for home made American candy.

Request:—"Would you be so kind as to give me your opinion regarding the confection business in Buenos Aires? I know that there are a great many brokers and wholesalers there who handle candy. But what I would like to know especially is what type of stuff they particularly like; and are there sweets there that can compare with our best so-called home made candies?"

—E. W. TAYLOR, Salt Lake City, Utah

Reply, by Dr. Paul Vanorden Shaw:—I am going to answer your letter very frankly. Not only would one have to make candy as good as the best in this country, but far better than most of it, for the simple reason that the Argentines are accustomed to a grade of confection and candy we know nothing about in this country. There is no market for the American type. Their candies are mostly of the finest European type and make.

Baseball

HOW to pitch an outcurve.

Request:—"I wonder if you could give me some pointers on the pitching of an outcurve."

—JOHN HALL, Yonkers, New York

Reply, by Mr. Frederick G. Lieb:—There are several ways of pitching an outcurve. One is to hold the ball between the thumb on one side and the index and middle finger on the other side. The ball is held over the head and as it is brought down the wrist is snapped toward you, thus giving the ball a spin. However, this delivery must be practised so that the real break comes to the ball as it crosses the plate.

Some pitchers pitch this outcurve with the fingers up and thumb down, and others with the thumb up and the other fingers down. Pitchers with abnormally large hands have pitched this ball with their hand covering the entire baseball and have let it go with a last moment wrist snap.

Spalding's Athletic Library has a volume which deals with pitching, while Reach's put out a little pamphlet entitled "Reach's Playing Pointers" which treats some of the pitching fundamentals.

Antipodes

WINDJAMMER records between Australia and New Zealand.

Request:—"At the suggestion of Capt. Dingle, I am submitting to you the following request for information:

What is the speed record between New Zealand and Australia held by a sailing vessel?"

—L. C. MYERS, Hurley, New Mexico

Reply, by Mr. Tom L. Mills:—Living inland has its disadvantages, and you have suffered as a result in unavoidable delay in getting an answer to your query. I expended some time and patience with men who should be deemed experts up in Auckland and down in Wellington, and then unexpectedly a friend of a friend loaned me his records from which I am able at last to answer you. The Tasman Sea, an anything but pacific stretch of water between Australia and New Zealand, has carried many sailing vessels in days of old and days of gold, and vessels as small as that of Chris Columbus have tried to put up records. It is about 1100 miles from Sydney to Auckland. The fastest passage ever made across by a sailer is still credited to a pretty little topsail schooner, the *Huia,* which ran from Sydney, in Australia, to Kaipara Heads, north of Auckland, in the remarkable time of 4 days and 6 hours. The *Huia* still sails these seas, and a couple of years ago she did the run from Auckland to Melbourne in 10 days.

The old timber carrying ships were keen in rivalry, one of these big ships doing the trans-Tasman voyage in 6½ days in 1859. Three years later the bark *Alice Cameron* reduced this to 5 days 22 hours and that was not broken for 15 years. The 22 hours were cut off in 1876 by the collier bark *Adela* from Newcastle, in New South Wales, to Auckland. It was not until the nineties that the *Huia* broke all records, and as the sailing ship is now a diminishing quantity it is likely to stand for all time. In a challenge yacht race last year the winner sailed from Auckland to Sydney in 11 days 22 hours.

Barbecue

FORMULAS for the basting sauce.

Request:—"I would like to get your recipe for making barbecue sauce. Had one by the late Horace Kephart, but lost it while in California."

—DAVID L. WARD, Ft. Sam Houston, Texas

Reply, by Mr. Paul M. Fink:—The sauce for basting barbecue which Kephart gave in his "Camp Cookery" is this:

"One pint of vinegar, half a can of tomatoes, two teaspoonfuls of red pepper (chopped pepper-pods are better), a teaspoonful of black pepper, same of salt, two tablespoonfuls of butter. Simmer together till it is completely amalgamated. Have a bit of clean cloth or sponge tied on the end of a stick, and keep the meat well basted with the dressing as long as it is on the fire."

Another formula with a slightly different tang is: One pint of vinegar, juice of two lemons, large bottle of tomato catsup, two teaspoonfuls of red pepper, large onion chopped fine, tablespoonful salt and lump of butter size of egg. Simmer and apply same as above.

Knives

BOLOS and machetes are tools as well as weapons.

Request:—"What is the approximate length, width and weight of a bolo, kris, machete and barong? By what nationality is each most used?"

—T. C. GRAY, Madison, Wisconsin

Reply, by Capt. Robert E. Gardner:—The bolo, kris and barong are, generally speaking, weapons of Southern Asia and the islands of the Pacific. They are in use in Borneo, Malay States, Java, Philippine Islands and elsewhere. The machete is very much like the bolo in design, but is found chiefly in South and Central America.

The bolo is usually about 26 inches in length with blade about 2½ inches in width at its widest point. The Tenagre form of the bolo (typical of the Island of Panay, P. I.) is usually much longer. The bolo has a heavy single edged blade which is much wider near the tip than at the base. The back of the blade is straight, the edge convex, with the greatest weight of the blade near the tip. It is claimed that a blow struck with a bolo approximates a blow struck with an ax.

The barong, which is said to have originated with the Moros, and the kris, which probably came from Malay, are not as well designed for use as a brush knife as the bolo. The four types mentioned in your inquiry could be used as weapons or tools, all four being equally effective as weapons, but the bolo and machete making the best tools.

Canada

GOLD claims in southern Quebec.

Request:—"1. Has any gold been found in southern Quebec? If so, where?

2. Where can I purchase a detailed map of this region and what is the price of same?"

—WM. CLAUDE, Seaford, Long Island

Reply, by Mr. William MacMillan:—While gold has been found in southern Quebec at various times it has never amounted to anything worthwhile. A group dredged for alluvial gold in Beauce County some time ago, abandoning the undertaking about two years ago. On the other hand, just recently a man by the name of Carl Sekeyers located over a period of time some 240 ounces of gold. And again, last year some prospectors, of whose identity the writer is unaware, found gold near Sherbrooke.

In the spring of 1931, Johnny Drouin staked out ground for gold on Range 9, Northwest half of lots 15 and 16, in Spalding Township, which is more or less well known. What success he will meet with in the future is, of course, in the lap of the gods.

The best type of maps of this district are the topographical ones issued by the Department of National Defence, Ottawa, at a cost of 25 cents a sheet.

These sheets come 24 by 18 inches in size and scale a mile to the inch.

Marine

IF YOU'VE lost your discharge you can get a certificate.

Request:—"A short while after I was discharged from the Marine Corps I lost my discharge in a fire with the rest of my belongings. So now I would like very much to obtain another. To whom do I apply?"

—D. C. WILSON, Denver, Colorado

Reply, by Capt. F. W. Hopkins:—To secure a duplicate of your discharge, address a letter to the Adjutant & Inspector, U. S. Marine Corps, Headquarters, Washington, D. C. State simply that you enlisted in the Marine Corps on a certain date, were discharged at such and such a post on a certain date, and that since then you have had your discharge certificate and other personal belongings destroyed by fire, and request that a duplicate certificate be issued.

Give the dates as nearly accurate as possible, and state your full name, just as you signed the pay rolls, as there were in a period of time undoubtedly a number of D. C. Wilsons. If you have a G. C. Medal, suggest that you give the number of it for further identification.

They will send you a certificate in lieu of a discharge.

Spaniels

NICE dogs, but they can't compete with beagles on a rabbit trail.

Request:—"I am much interested in the spaniel dog family and wish the names belonging to this family. Do the setters belong to the spaniel family? What are the outstanding differences between the cocker and springer spaniel? Do they come in the same color? Which is the better hunter?"

—R. L POLLARD, New Castle, Pennsylvania

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—Setters do not belong to present spaniel family, though they originated partly from them. There are cockers, Blenheim, clumber, field, springer, Sussex spaniels. The outstanding difference in cocker and springer is in the size. They come often in same colors. Neither is the better hunter, though the cocker is the stronger, and better for rough going. The cocker is in most demand for hunting in solid black, but roan, liver and white, liver and buff are very popular. Number of pups average about six.

As rabbit dogs cockers and springers are very ordinary. They hunt only to spring the game within range of gun, but do not follow trail and turn it back to a hunter as well as a beagle or regular rabbit hound.

Grand Canyon

YOU must be prepared to live like a badger if you venture into Arizona's northwest corner.

Request:—"Is the country in the northwest corner of Arizona—that part cut off by the Grand Canyon—open for prospecting or homesteading?

—MURL MORIARTY, Monterey, California

Reply, by Mr. E. E. Harriman:—The last time I was in Arizona they told me that northwest corner was vacant save for an occasional prospector who traveled light and camped just as light. I don't suppose a cabin has ever been built there. It is wild—much too wild for most men accustomed to wild living, and yet it may be rich in minerals. Such parts often are. If I were half my present age I would have explored every foot of that corner long ago, being inclined that way by nature; but I have not, so go to it and stake a rich claim. It is not fit for a homestead! My friends who know it say it's only for the prospector and the adventure lover. I have known two men, now dead, who had poked into every corner of it and they said no man should go there unless prepared to live like a prairie dog or badger. There you have the estimate of two who thought little of living like Indians of the desert.

Crocodile

CONTENTS of an African croc's stomach.

Request:—"A friend informs me that human bones are almost always found in the stomachs of African crocodiles. Is this authentic information?" —GEO. MARSHALL, Medford, Oregon

Reply, by Capt. F. J. Franklin:—Although I have never personally examined the contents of a crocodile, I can supply you with this authentic information which I obtained from my files of the Cape *Times*.

About 4 years ago Mr. K. Lee Guiness, the well known racing motorist, killed a monster crocodile 15 feet long. Inside the stomach they found eight long rows of beads which, when worn with a girdle, formed the walking costume of a native girl who had been missing from her kraal for six months; one pair of silver circular earrings; one jam jar; the neck of a bottle; one small string of native beads of a pattern which had been out of local fashion for over 50 years; dozens of brass rifle cartridges.

If I find anything more in my files concerning your question I will mail the data on to you.

An Ask Adventure section on the increasingly popular sport of Wrestling is under consideration. Readers who feel that they are fully qualified to serve as expert on this subject are invited to state their qualifications by letter to the Managing Editor, *Adventure*, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelope and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.
2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **DO NOT** send questions to this magazine.
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.
4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, 536 Park St., Chicago, Illinois.

Motor Boating GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, New Jersey.

Motor Camping MAJOR CHAS. G. PERCIVAL, M. D., care American Tourist Camp Assn., 152 West 65th St., New York City.

Yachting A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Place, Chicago. Ill.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, legislative restrictions and traffic.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Automotive and Aircraft Engines *Design, operation and maintenance.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes: wing shooting.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons *pole arms and armor.*—CAPT. ROBERT E. GARDNER, High-Seventh Armory, Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D. Box 322, Westfield, New Jersey.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercises, food and habits.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Box 322, Westfield, New Jersey.

Camping and Woodcraft Paul M. Fink, Jonesboro, Tennessee.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere in North America. Questions on mines, mining, mining law, methods and practise; where and how to prospect; outfitting; development of prospect after discovery; general geology and mineralogy necessary for prospector or miner in any portion of territory named. Any question on any mineral, metallic or nonmetallic.*—Victor Shaw, Loring, Alaska.

Precious and Semi-precious Stones *Cutting and polishing of gem materials; principal sources of supply; technical information regarding physical characteristics, crystallography, color and chemical composition.*—F. J. Esterlin, 210 Post St., San Francisco, Cal.

Forestry in the United States *Big-Game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and products; economic possibilities; distribution; exploration, etc. No questions on employment.*—William R. Barbour, care of Insular Forester, Rio Piedras, Porto Rico.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration work, advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman, rate clerk, General Information.*—R. T. Newman, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign Captain Glen R. Townsend, Ripon, Wisconsin.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—Lieut. Francis V. Greene, U. S. N. R. (Retired), 442 Forty-ninth St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps Capt. F. W. Hopkins, 541 No. Harper Ave., Hollywood, Cal.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. Parachutes and gliders. No questions on stock promotion.*—Lieutenant Jeffrey R. Starks, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police Francis H. Bent, Box 176, Farmingdale, N. J.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Patrick Lee, 3432 83rd Street, Jackson Heights, New York.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.*—Thomas H. Dameron, 1709 Berkley Ave., Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs John B. Thompson, care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—Arthur Woodward, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy Seth Bullock, care *Adventure.*

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects, etc.*—Dr. S. W. Frost, Arendtsville, Pa.

Herpetology *General information on reptiles and amphibians; their habits and distribution.*—Karl P. Schmidt, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Illinois.

Ichthyology *Fishes and lower aquatic vertebrates.*—George S. Myers, Stanford University, Calif.

Ornithology *General information on birds; their habits and distribution.*—Davis Quinn, 3548 Tryon Ave., Bronx, New York, N. Y.

Stamps H. A. Davis, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals Howland Wood, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—Paul L. Anderson, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

★**Linguistics and Ethnology** *(a) Racial and tribal tradition; folklore and mythology. (b) Languages and the problems of race migration. (c) Individual languages and language families; interrelation of tongues.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, care *Adventure.*

Old Songs that Men Have Sung Robert W. Gordon, *Archive of American Folk-Song: Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

Football John B. Foster, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose Street, New York City.

Baseball Frederick Lieb, *The New York Evening Post,* 75 West St., New York City.

Track Jackson Scholz, P. O. Box 163, Jenkintown, Pa.

Basketball I. S. Rose, 321 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Bicycling Arthur J. LeaMond, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming Louis DeB. Handley, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

†**Skiing and Snowshoeing** W. H. Price, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "Daniel," *The World-Telegram,* 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery Earl B. Powell, care of *Adventure.*

Boxing Capt. Jean V. Grombach.

Fencing Capt. Jean V. Grombach, 455 West 23rd St. New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, wages, duties, addresses of all ocean lines and liners; shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—Lieut. Harry E. Rieseberg, 118 Uhler St., Mt. Ida, Alexandria, Va.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping: names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of an American documental steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all government owned vessels.*—Lieut. Harry E. Rieseberg, 118 Uhler St., Mt. Ida, Alexandria, Va.

★**The Sea Part 3** *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—Captain Dingle, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans: Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—Capt. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

★**The Sea Part 5** *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.*—Capt. Dingle, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean. (Siberian Waters.)*—Capt. C. L. Oliver, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii Dr. Neville Whymant, care *Adventure.*

Philippine Islands Buck Connor, Quartzsite, Arizona, care of Conner Field.

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. Armit, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa** Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star,* Feilding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** Alan Foley, 18a Sandridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

★**South Sea Islands** William McCreadie, "Cardross", Suva, Fiji.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States; and Yunnan.*—Gordon MacCreagh, Box 197, Centerport, Long Island, N. Y.

Asia Part 2 *Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies in general, India, Kashmir.*—Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 3 *Anam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin, China.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 4** *Southern and Eastern China.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 6** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—George W. Twomey, M. D., U. S. Veterans' Hospital, Fort Snelling, Minn. and Dr. Neville Whymant, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 7 *Japan.*—Oscar E. Riley, 4 Huntington Ave., Scarsdale, New York.

Asia Part 8 *Persia, Arabia.*—Captain Beverley-Giddings, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Minor** Dr. Neville Whymant, care *Adventure.*

★**Africa Part 1** *Egypt.*—Dr. Neville Whymant.

Africa Part 2 *Abyssinia, French Somaliland, Belgian Congo.*—Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler, care of *Adventure.*

Africa Part 3 (British) *Sudan, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya.*—Capt. R. W. van Raven de Sturler, care of *Adventure.*

Africa Part 4 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, caravan trade and caravan routes.*—Captain Beverley-Giddings, care *Adventure.*

★**Africa Part 5** *Tunis and Algeria.*—Dr. Neville Whymant, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Morocco.*—George E. Holt, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 7 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar; West Africa; Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—N. E. Nelson, Firestone Plantations Company, Akron, Ohio.

Africa Part 8 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal and Rhodesia.*—Captain F. J. Franklin, Adventure Camp, Box 107, Santa Susana, Cal.

✠**Africa Part 9** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ontario, Canada.

Madagascar Ralph Linton, 324 Sterling Hall, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis.

Europe Part 1 *Jugo-Slavia and Greece.*—Capt. Wm. W. Jenna, West Point, New York.

Europe Part 2 *Albania.*—Robert S. Townsend, P. O. Box 303, Damariscotta, Maine.

Europe Part 4 *Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Poland.*—G. I. Colbron, East Avenue, New Canaan, Conn.

Europe Part 5 *Scandinavia.*—Robert S. Townsend, P. O. Box 303, Damariscotta, Maine.

Europe Part 6 *Great Britain.*—Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Avenue, London, W. C. 2, England.

Europe Part 7 *Denmark.*—G. I. Colbron, East Avenue, New Canaan, Conn.

Europe Part 8 *Holland.*—J. J. LeBleu, 51 Benson Drive, Glen Ridge, New Jersey.

Europe Part 9 *France, Belgium.*—J. D. Newsom, care *Adventure.*

Europe Part 10 *Spain.*—J. D. Newsom, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 1 *Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—Edgar Young, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil.*—Dr. Paul Vanorden Shaw, 457 W. 123rd St., New York, N. Y.

✠**West Indies** *Cuba, Isle of Pines, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—John B. Leffingwell, Box 1333, Nueva Gerona, Isle of Pines, Cuba.

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—E. Bruguiere, 10 Gay St., New York City.

Mexico Part 1 *Northern Border States of old Mexico, Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamanulipas.*—J. W. Whiteaker, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

✠**Mexico Part 2** *Southern Lower California.*—C. R. Mahaffey, Finca "Flores de Italia", San Juan, Benque, Atlantida, Honduras.

Mexico Part 3 *Southeastern Federal Territory of Quintana Roo and States of Yucatan and Campeche.* Also archeology.—W. Russell Sheets, 301 Poplar Ave., Takoma Park, Md.

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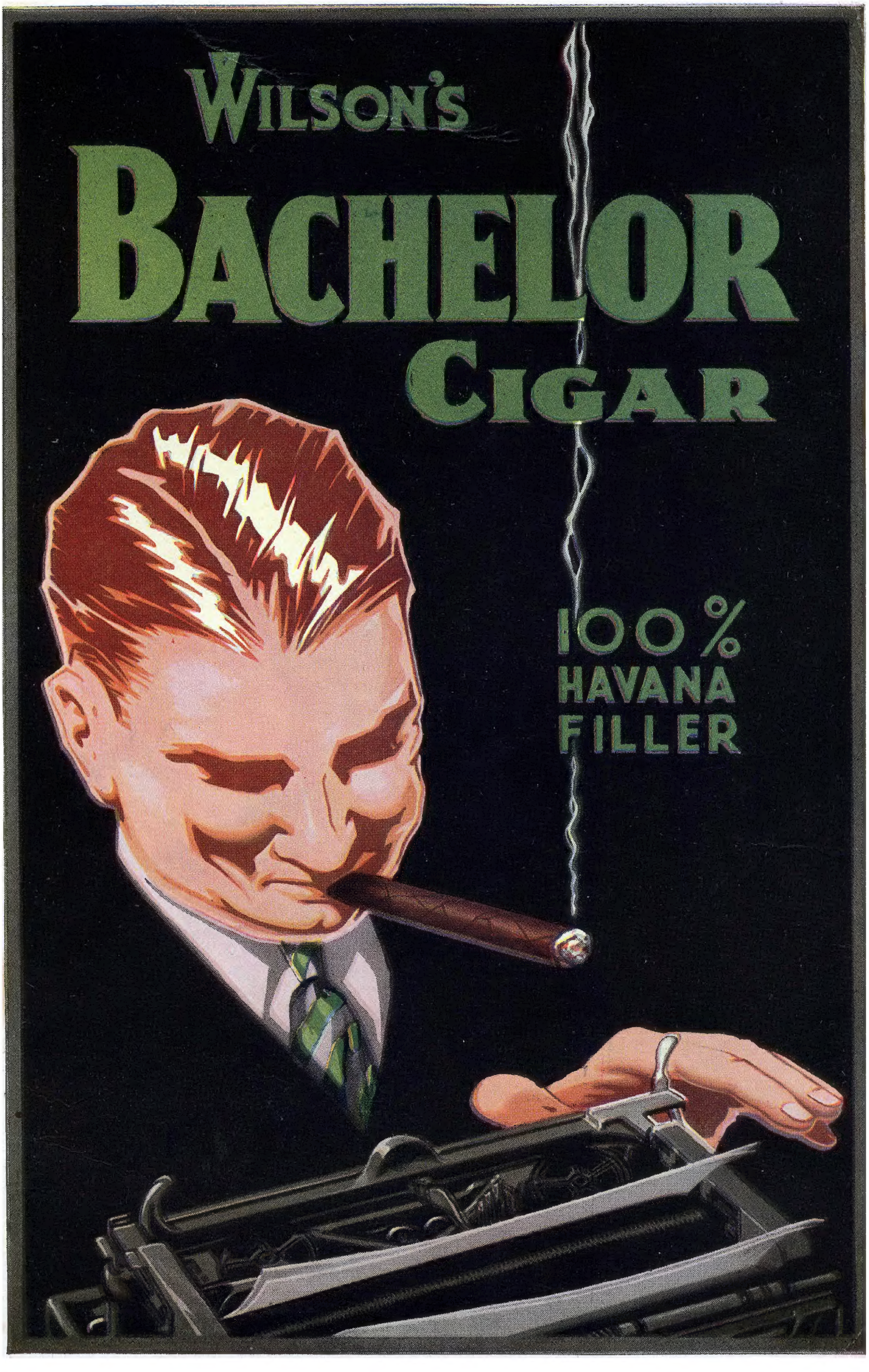
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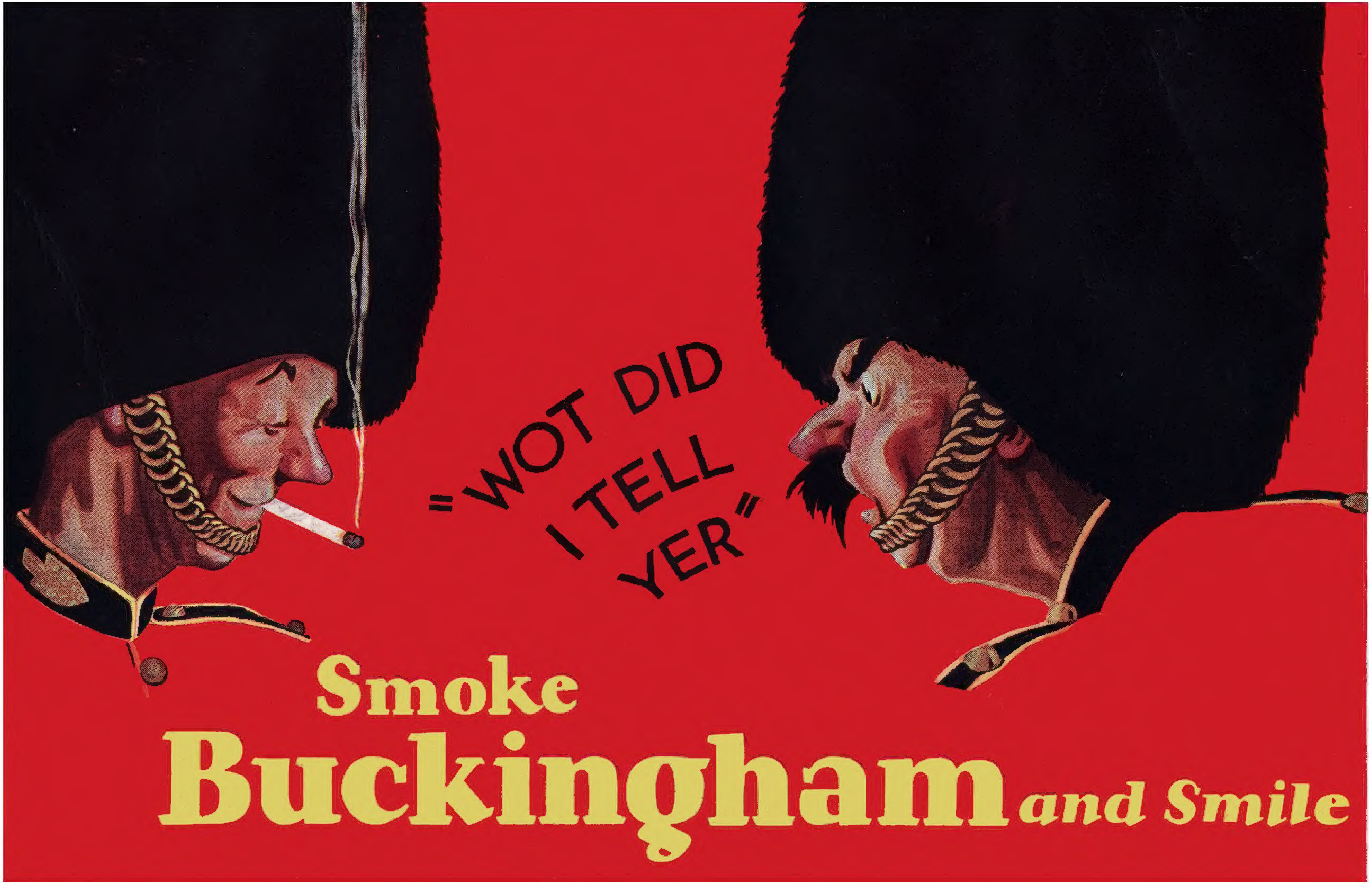
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